



The Oral History of Garry Tucker

November 14, 2019

Interview conducted by John Cornely in Annapolis, MD



Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Garry Tucker

Date of Interview: 11/14/2019

Location of Interview: Annapolis, MD

Interviewer: John Cornely

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 20 years

Offices and Field Stations Worked; Positions Held: Division of Education Outreach (Arlington, Virginia and NCTC) - Course Leader; Division of Planning (Atlanta Regional Office) - Coordinator of Public Meetings; Division of Visitor Services Refuges (Atlanta Regional Office) - Environmental Coordinator; Division of Visitor Services Refuges (Atlanta Regional Office) - Chief of Visitor Services

Most Important Projects: Developing and teaching courses for the Division of Education Outreach; Chief of Visitor Services in Refuges; collaborative work with Ducks Unlimited and the annual Federal Duck Stamp contest.

Colleagues and Mentors: Janet Ady, Cheryl Simpson, Jim Burkhart, Dawn Whitmore, Bonnie Strawser, Gaye Brantley, Kay McCutcheon, Robin Will, Frank Prodriznik and Richard Matteson, Deborah Jerome, Kyla Hastie, Stacy Armitage, Kevin Lowry, Sally Gentry

Brief Summary of Interview: Garry recounts growing up on a farm in Minneola, Alabama where they raised cattle and farmed corn, cotton and soybeans. After graduating high school in 1973, he went to college at Auburn University earning a bachelor's degree in secondary science education. While at Auburn, he met his wife, Sandy. Garry taught high school in Baton Rouge, Louisiana for two years, while Sandy was in graduate school at LSU. In 1980, they moved back to Auburn, so that Garry could go to graduate school. Shortly after that, Sandy got her first job with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in Decatur, Alabama. After receiving a masters in entomology, he began working for the State of Alabama as an agricultural "honeybee" inspector. He later worked in a landscaping business and also taught high school biology for about nine years. By 1991, Garry and Sandy have two daughters, ages six and two years old, and Sandy accepts a job with FWS in Anchorage, Alaska. Garry relates his experience working for the Imaginarium Science Discovery Museum as a science educator and travels to the rural parts of Alaska with exhibits and curriculum. They left Alaska in 1994, when Sandy took a position at the "new" National Conservation Training Center (still in the planning stages in 1994). This is where Garry began his career with the FWS in the Division of Education Outreach as a training technician and course leader. Years later, they moved to Georgia where Sandy worked in the Ecological Services (ES) offices and Garry worked in the Division of Planning and then in the Division of Visitor Services in Refuges as Chief of Visitor Services for the southeast region. It was during this time that he became involved with the Federal Duck Stamp contest, which he really enjoyed.

THE INTERVIEW

JOHN CORNELLY: This is John Cornely with the US Fish and Wildlife Service Heritage Committee, and I'm with Garry Tucker today. It's the 14th of November 2019. We're at the DoubleTree Hotel in Annapolis, Maryland in conjunction with the retirees reunion and Heritage Committee member [Correction: meeting]. I have the pleasure of having Garry talk to us about his life and career today. I have Sandy Tucker in the room observing, and Flavia Rutkoski is here to observe. They both also do interviews so we're glad to have them here observing. And with that, Garry, I'll just let you start with your birth date and wander through your life.

GARRY TUCKER: I'm Garry Tucker. I was born December 8th, 1954, in south Alabama in a small town called Atmore, Alabama. It was the closest town with a hospital. I actually grew up on a farm about 80 miles north of Mobile, Alabama, in the middle of the country. The closest town was eight miles away. That was a little town called Uriah, Alabama. That's where the school was that I went to elementary school. My dad and mom farmed down in a little community called Minneola, Alabama, and my grandparents lived half a mile from us. My dad and his brother and my granddad farmed the land that we lived on.

JOHN CORNELLY: What kind of farming were they involved in?

GARRY TUCKER: Anything that would make money, but primarily beef cattle and then, corn and a little bit of cotton. At one point, soybeans. I can't remember, I'm guessing it was two or three hundred farmable acres and then pastureland and stuff like that. A little bit of forest. So, I grew up on that farm. When I was about seven, I think it was, my dad and his brother went together and bought a feed mill farm supply store in the little town eight miles from our home in Uriah, Alabama. At that point, we farmed and operated the feed mill. People would come and get their cattle feed from us and stuff like that. So that was my life growing up until I went away to college, for the most part. There were things about growing up on the farm that I loved, but farming is incredibly hard work, and I'd made up my mind pretty early that as soon as I could get off the farm, I was going to get off the farm and go do something else. Didn't know what it was, but didn't want to be farming.

JOHN CORNELLY: So, when you were going to elementary school, the school was several miles away.

GARRY TUCKER: Eight miles away.

JOHN CORNELLY: Was there a school bus?

GARRY TUCKER: Yes, I rode a school bus. I had two older sisters, and the school that I went to at that time was K through 12. Actually, I don't think we had K back in the 1960s, but anyway, it was first grade through 12th grade, J.U. Blacksher High School in Uriah, Alabama. My sisters were ahead of me, so we caught the bus every morning; rode the eight plus miles into town to go to school. Then, I guess it was about in my 10th grade year, my parents decided to send me and my younger - my two older sisters had

graduated by then - decided to send me and my younger sister to a private school. So, I graduated from Munroe Academy in Monroeville, Alabama, which was about another 20 miles, and I rode a bus there.

JOHN CORNELLY: So, the private school had a bus?

GARRY TUCKER: The members of the community, whose children went to that school, bought a bus. [In] my 11th grade and 12th grade year, I was actually the backup bus driver for the bus, and there were several times that I ran the bus route and kept the bus at the house.

JOHN CORNELLY: What year did you graduate from that private school?

GARRY TUCKER: I graduated high school in 1973. At that point, I was still living on the farm, working on the farm, working at the feed mill. So, it's time to go to college, and there was no question in our family of where you went to college. You went to Auburn University. So, I enrolled at Auburn. In my family, there were three girls and a boy. I was the boy. In my dad's brother's family, there were three boys and a girl. The older boy was my age, and we pretty much grew up together. So, when it came time to go to college, we both went off to Auburn and a couple of buddies of ours from high school went, too. So, we roomed together there at Auburn. When I started college, I had this idea that I was going to be a lab technician. I was going to go into the medical arena and do lab technology, and that lasted about a week in college. I changed my major the first year that I was there and I changed into horticulture. I decided I was going to be in horticulture and was more the general horticulture rather than ornamental or landscapes or fruit trees. I guess the farm background still was there. So anyway, I went into horticulture, and I came within 30 hours [of graduating.] This was a quarter system there at Auburn. I came within 30 hours, which was about a year that I had left to get my degree in horticulture. I was having trouble getting the classes lined up that I needed, so I just got a wild hair one day and went and changed my major again, and I changed to secondary science education. I tell people that by going to summer school, by taking extra courses, by doubling up [class]loads, I was able to squeeze my four years into five years. So, in five years I graduated from Auburn in 1978 with a degree in secondary science education. While I was at Auburn though, before I graduated, I met Sandy Tucker. She was Sandy Smoot at that point. You wouldn't know it to hear me, but I took a speech class in college, and Sandy was sitting in front of me. I borrowed a pencil from her, and she was somewhat appalled that somebody would come to a college class without a pencil. But we worked it out.

SANDY TUCKER: And paper.

GARRY TUCKER: That was Sandy talking there. I didn't have paper either, but anyway, we worked it out. We dated those last couple years of college. When I graduated, she had worked harder and graduated a little ahead of me, even though she started after I did. So, we were both through at Auburn, we got married in 1978, and Sandy started graduate school at LSU (Louisiana State University) at the end of that summer, fall of '78. We were married, so I went with her, and I got a job teaching high school there in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, at Scotlandville High School. I taught there the two years that Sandy was in graduate school.

JOHN CORNELLY: What did you teach?

GARRY TUCKER: I taught general science, basic general science, and physical science.

While I was at Auburn originally, getting my undergraduate degree, when I was in horticulture, I took *Introduction to Beekeeping*. I met Dr. George Blake, and Dr. Blake took me under his wing, and we hung out together a lot. I worked for him as a work study student, helping manage the bee lab there and helping manage the teaching hives that we used to teach the *Introduction to Beekeeping*. Dr. Blake also taught *Economic Entomology*, so I was his lab assistant. I helped run the labs for the entomology class. Anyway, Sandy is at graduate school at LSU, I'm teaching at Scotlandville High School, and she finishes, and it's time to see what we're going to do next. So, I guess I should have started this story by just basically saying that, as we go through my career, and I don't mean this with any ill feelings or hard feelings or anything, my career has been following Sandy's career, and I'm in a much better place than I probably would have been if I'd have had to make decisions on my own. (laughter) So, I appreciate her helping me get where I am today. She finished at LSU, and it's time to see what comes next. I contacted Dr. Blake back at Auburn, and I said, "I'd like to come work on my masters. Would you be my major professor?" And he says, "Well, I don't do major professor stuff anymore, but I'll do it for you." So, we went back to Auburn, and Sandy was starting her career, at that point. She found a job there at Auburn, so I could go back to graduate school.

JOHN CORNELLY: And what year was this that you went back?

GARRY TUCKER: This would have been in 1980. About the time we got back to Auburn, maybe six months into that or less, Sandy got her first job with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service working in Daphne, Alabama.

SANDY TUCKER: No, Decatur, Alabama.

GARRY TUCKER: Thank you. That's right, Decatur, Alabama, up in north Alabama which, in one way, was good because it was near where her mom and dad lived in Huntsville, Alabama, so she could live with her mom and dad and work in the Decatur office and then occasionally come check on me at Auburn, on the weekends and things like that. So, we lived like that for almost two years. Sandy living with her mom and dad, and me finishing up graduate school.

JOHN CORNELLY: So, did you write a thesis?

GARRY TUCKER: I did. My area of study was honeybees. I got a master's in entomology, there, from Auburn. I did a comparison of honey production for hives of bees that had to make their comb versus hives of bees that were provided the comb for them. That was the basis of the research. So, over the two years, we established I think, if I remember, 120 to 150 hives and had them in thirds. One third got no comb and one third got half comb, and there's a sheet of wax called foundation that you put in a beehive for the bees to make their comb. That gets the comb in the right position for the bees. So, some of the bees got only foundation. Some of them got half comb/half foundation, and some of them got full comb. And we went through a couple of seasons and measured the honey production. Anyway, that was that. I got my master's in entomology.

JOHN CORNELLY: Who made the most honey?

GARRY TUCKER: You know, it was interesting. The best we could figure out was there was no significant difference, which is totally not what I expected. That's at least how it turned out in those experiments. About the time that I graduated, Sandy's office in Decatur, Alabama, the ES office in Decatur where she worked, got relocated to Daphne, Alabama, which is going from north Alabama to

south Alabama. Daphne is in Baldwin County, across the bay from Mobile. So, I'm graduated, I'm looking for a job, and the State of Alabama had a program for inspecting – I guess they were called agricultural inspectors – and one aspect of the agricultural inspection was inspecting honeybees for certain types of diseases and conditions. So, they were hiring temporary positions to fill out their labor needs. They needed somebody in south Alabama. I was moving to south Alabama. I knew the state bee inspector from work we did there at Auburn. So, he asked me if I'd be interested in a temporary job in south Alabama, and I said, "Yes." So, I went to work for the State of Alabama as a honeybee inspector, which was a pretty cool job, because you rode all over the place in south Alabama in a government vehicle and looked at people's beehives and tested them for diseases and things like that.

JOHN CORNELLY: So, did you have to test the individual bees?

GARRY TUCKER: The things we were looking for were, it was called *foul brood*. So, it was the larva of the bees. And there would be certain visual characteristics that you'd look for in the comb where the brood was. You had to open the hive, pull the frames out, observe the brood.

JOHN CORNELLY: Did you have to put on all the equipment the beekeepers put on?

GARRY TUCKER: You did. You geared up with your veil. I was very accustomed to being around bees at this point in my life, and I wore the veil because I didn't like them around my eyes. But other than that, sometimes we were working really hard and fast, and we'd wear long gloves, you know, leather gloves and things like that. And then I guess real quick - another piece of that inspection was inspecting pesticide storage areas for nurseries and plant shops. So, that was in the winter when I wasn't working bees. I say that because, about six months to a year after I started this job, they decided to make it permanent. So, I had to apply for it as a state position, you had to apply for it. It was a bad time in the economy for people, so they had people applying for it with PhDs and 20 years of experience, not necessarily related to the job, but somehow close to related to the job. So, the short story is I didn't get the job. So, I was again looking for a job, and one of the guys that I'd met inspecting his plant shop said, "Come sell house plants." So, I went to work there and worked there for a while and, through that job, met a guy that did landscaping. It turns out we'd been in [in class together at Auburn.] Remember way back there when I thought I was going to be a horticulturalist, and I took some classes? I met Tynes Stringfellow in a class, and we reconnected down in Fairhope, Alabama. He's running this pretty successful landscaping business, landscaping condos in Gulf Shores, Alabama. So, I went to work for him and worked for him for a couple of years and learned a lot about the landscaping business and started remembering that it was kind of like farming in some ways. One day, I guess I had a bad day at work one day and, on the way home, I stopped and called the Baldwin County Board of Education and asked them if they had any jobs available, and they did. So, I went back to teaching high school. But at this point, they needed math teachers, and they needed them so bad that they agreed to let a person teach math as long as they would work towards adding math to their certificate. So, I went and taught math and took some classes to add math to my certificate. But before I could get all that done, a science teacher position came open. So, I got back to teaching high school biology in Foley High School in Foley, Alabama. I did that for nine years, and the last two years of it, I had put in a proposal that we start teaching marine biology. Being right there on the coast, it just seemed like a good idea. So, I got selected, along with teachers from two other high schools, to develop a marine biology course. And so, we piloted that for a couple of years. Things are going good, and I'm enjoying this notoriety of being a marine biology teacher. Life is good. I'm coaching high school soccer and cross country, and we now have Natalie and Kelly, our daughters, at this point. Natalie must have been six and Kelly must have been two, and Sandy came home one day and said, "Guess what?" And I said, "What?" And she said, "I got that job." And I said, "What job?" She said, "That one in

Alaska.” And I said, “What job in Alaska?” She said, “The one I told you about.” I said, “Okay.” So, we moved to Alaska. We got up there, and I assumed that when I got to Alaska that I would find a job teaching. But I also knew -Sandy and I talked a bit - and we knew that we were not in Alaska for the rest of our lives. At least, that's what she told me to get me to go. So, I struggled with it because I really liked teaching. But I also feel that to be a good teacher, you have to really commit to your community. You have to really commit to the families that you're working with and things like that. I knew I wasn't going to be there long term so, I just really didn't want to put all the effort into what I think you have to do to be a good teacher, to be turning around three years later and leaving at the end.

JOHN CORNELLY: Where was your job, Sandy?

GARRY TUCKER: Where was Sandy's job?

SANDY TUCKER: Anchorage field office.

GARRY TUCKER: Anchorage field office. So, we were in Anchorage, Alaska. Which is, if you've got to be in a city in Alaska, that's probably the one to be in because it's got all the amenities that you look for. So, I'm without a job, and that's a hard blow to a male ego to not be able to provide for your family, like men are supposed to provide for their families. So, I was not happy, at that point. Then, a person that Sandy worked with said, “My husband used to work at the [Imaginarium] Science Museum. Garry should go over there and see if they've got any jobs.” At that time, there was a small, I think it was like six- or seven-years-old, family science discovery museum that these two ladies in Alaska decided they needed to create. So, they wrote grants and got money and had a small staff of four or five people and a maintenance guy. So anyway, I went in and introduced myself and, because I had the connection of Matt, whatever Matt's name was, who had been there...

SANDY TUCKER: He actually worked for the Park Service.

GARRY TUCKER: But he had worked at the Imaginarium for a little while, and they loved him. And because I said, “I know Matt.” They said, “Well, let's see what we got.” So, what they had at that point was they needed a temporary maintenance person, so I got on as the maintenance person. Then about the time that all happened, they wrote a grant to the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and the grant was to take science into rural parts of Alaska. Part of the grant was to hire a science educator, and they realize that was my expertise. So, they hired me as a science educator for the museum, and we developed traveling exhibits and curriculum for the exhibits. Then, we got to go to any place in Alaska that you couldn't drive to. That was the rule so, we took the exhibits....

JOHN CORNELLY: That's pretty much the [entire] state.

GARRY TUCKER: That's pretty much Alaska. During the three years that we were there, I got to take science to Barrow, Alaska and King Cove, Alaska and Juneau, Alaska. That was probably one of the most fun jobs I've ever had in my life, just bottom line. So, I got over being mad at Sandy for making me go live in Alaska. I forgave her, and it was a wonderful experience. Our girls were six and two and ended up being nine and five by the time we left. They still talk about living in Alaska and the adventures we had living in Alaska. So, about the end of that three years...

JOHN CORNELLY: Tells us what year we're up to here.

GARRY TUCKER: I need Sandy to help me here. So, we went to Alaska in '91, so it was about '94 that we're leaving Alaska, late '93, '94. We left because Sandy got a job at a new piece of the Fish and Wildlife Service called the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) which, at this point, didn't exist in '94. It was all in the planning stages, but the idea was to go ahead and staff up, so that once the actual facility existed, they would have courses and things for students to come to the facility and do. In '94, we moved to Shepherdstown, West Virginia, and Sandy went to work at NCTC, which at that time was housed at the fish hatchery in Kearneysville.

SANDY TUCKER: Leetown.

GARRY TUCKER: Leetown, West Virginia. That's right. Leetown Fish Hatchery. So anyways, Sandy's working out there, and I'm, again, without a job. So, Sandy (looking at Sandy) how did we know Janet?

SANDY TUCKER: From Alaska. I knew Janet from Alaska.

GARRY TUCKER: Okay, so Janet Ady, who worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service for NCTC in the Branch or Division of Education Outreach, was having a conversation with Sandy and asked, "How's Garry? What's he doing?" And Sandy said, "He's sitting at home pouting." So, Janet called and asked if I would like to do some contract work. At this point, DEO, the Division of Education Outreach, is in Arlington, the Fish and Wildlife Service office in Arlington. All the rest of NCTC, the ES and all the other parts of NCTC except for DEO were in Leetown. So, I'm in Shepherdstown pouting, and Janet calls and asked if I'd like the contract work, and I said, "Sure."

So, I hired on as a contractor to be a – what did we call ourselves? A training assistant. We would put the notebooks together and print materials and stuff like that. So, I contracted for a while doing that. Shortly thereafter, some positions came open at NCTC to do training technician, and I applied for one and got it. So, I'm working for DEO for Division of Education Outreach, which is in Arlington, but I'm housed in Leetown with everybody else. So, Janet and I would talk on the phone and figure out what's needed. So, I'm the training technician for DEO, Division of Education Outreach, and I'm enjoying that a lot. Certainly, Janet is one of my favorites, and I'm blessed to get to work with her. Mike Smith eventually came out to DEO and was our Branch Chief. I don't remember the right terms, but anyway, Mike was in charge of DEO there for a while. I'm in Leetown. I'm a training tech. The rest of DEO was in Arlington. We're making it work; it's working fine. They had some positions advertised for course leaders, and you luck into some things in your career and, at that point, NCTC was trying to get the type of staff in place that they needed. They had some career ladder positions that were basically 9/11/12's called course leaders. So, I applied for one of those and got it. So, that's kind of my start with the Fish and Wildlife Service there at NCTC, starting out as a training tech and working myself into course leader.

JOHN CORNELLY: Did you apply for a course leader job that had a specific subject area?

GARRY TUCKER: It was in the Division of Education Outreach. At that point, we didn't have any courses. We were making them up. Not "making them up"; we were designing them. At that point, there was a lot of conversation about, *yes, it is about the resources, but if we don't figure out the people part of it, we're never going to solve the resource part of it.* So, a lot of the coursework that we were doing there in DEO was about helping folks who didn't get it go into the business because they wanted to be interacting with people, [so we] started trying to help them be better at interacting with people. Those are the kinds of courses we were working on. We had *General Education Outreach - An Overview*. That was

one of our flagship courses there for a while, and it was really just all about how to apply good communication into your resource management.

JOHN CORNELLY: So, let me ask this. For some time, you started to put staff together and started to develop these classes at NCTC. They're planning it and, at some point, they started building it. Did you train people in Leetown or other places for a while, where you actually had a training center to base?

GARRY TUCKER: Yeah. So, there was a classroom there at Leetown and so some classes came there and were held there in Leetown. But, for the most part, NCTC was *you find us a place to come teach you a class, and we'll come teach you a class*. So, we went all over the U.S., at that point.

JOHN CORNELLY: I know there were some waterfowl classes that were taught all over the country and other things. I never went to NCTC until long after it had been completed and there was training that I was trying to skip, and my Regional Director signed me up for it and said, "No, you're not getting out of that." That was my first trip out there.

GARRY TUCKER: So, the idea of staffing up ahead of time and developing these courses was so that once the facility opened, you have your program. In order to do that, we traveled around all the regions and offered classes wherever anybody wanted us to come do them. Then, the facility did open, and we transferred....

JOHN CORNELLY: When was that?

GARRY TUCKER: When did the facility open? I knew you were going to ask me that.

SANDY TUCKER: It must be '97. Right?

GARRY TUCKER: We went to Anchorage in '93.

SANDY TUCKER: We went to Anchorage in '91 and left in '94.

GARRY TUCKER: We were in Leetown for a couple of years. So, yeah, it must have been somewhere about '97. I should know that, but I don't.

JOHN CORNELLY: No, that's ok.

GARRY TUCKER: I think it's '96, '97.

JOHN CORNELLY: Just trying to get an idea.

SANDY TUCKER: Because we actually had several iterations of where we were. Remember, Garry? We were in Leetown, and then we moved in that weird building down Shepherd Grade Road because staff were growing, and we had (unintelligible).

GARRY TUCKER: Okay, I forgot about that. That was where graphic design was and all that right there. The folks in Arlington, didn't want all the rest of us starting our DEO/NCTC careers in Arlington, because then they would have had to pay a move. I mean, that's right. They would have to pay to move us all from Arlington out to Shepherdstown. So, they staffed us up. So, we moved into the facility, and I advanced as

a course leader. Between Leetown and NCTC, I was there about six years. And this was the start, as I said, of my Fish and Wildlife Service career. About four years into that, Sandy decided she needed something different than being a course leader at NCTC. So, she took a job in Arlington, and she commuted to Arlington every day. That was working. I think that was working for everybody.

JOHN CORNELLY: Interestingly enough, her commute wasn't as long as some people that were going into Arlington and other parts of D.C.

GARRY TUCKER: Right. Somewhere in that five-to-six-year range, Sandy got asked if she would come to Georgia and take the lead in the ES offices in Georgia. She told them, "No." She said, "I've got responsibilities here." We've got a daughter that's almost getting ready to graduate. *So, the answer is no.* So, I am six years at NCTC. Sandy's working in Arlington now, and they've asked Sandy if she'll come to Georgia, and she says no. The Christmas after they asked Sandy that, we had gone home to Alabama to visit family. We're driving back home to West Virginia, and our older daughter and younger daughter and Sandy are sitting in the back of the van, and our older daughter says, "You know, it sure would be nice not to have to be so far away from family anymore." And Sandy says, "Well, if you're serious about that, I can get us closer." So, the girls both agreed that they would be fine moving. So, Sandy went back to Sam Hamilton at the time and said, "I'm interested in the job in Georgia, but we can't come down there on just my salary," because we've got college coming up and all that. And Sam said, "Well, what does Garry do?" And she said, "He works in education outreach." So, they offered me a job in the Atlanta Regional Office working in the Division of Planning. The idea was that I would be the coordinator of the public meetings that went along with CCP (Comprehensive Conservation Plan) planning at that time. So, when I speak to people about your career and how to plan and manage your career, I suggest that they always marry someone who would be in great demand by your agency, so that they would even find you a job if they needed to. So, it's worked out.

JOHN CORNELLY: The timing was good, and you know, Sam was the right person to be around because, you know, a decade before that they would say, "Tough."

GARRY TUCKER: Right. So, I would say kudos to the Fish and Wildlife Service for making it work for families when they can. So, we moved to Georgia, and we make the decision to live in in Athens, Georgia, which is where Sandy's office was, and now, the commute is mine. So, I commuted from near Athens into Atlanta to the Regional Office. This job that they had for me was a nice job on paper because it was about working with the public and about getting public input, which I find very important. I was kind of thinking this is going to be fun. Of course, people who have ever been in public meetings probably think I'm nuts, for the most part. But best laid plans don't always work out. The CCP's that were going on at that point were either past the public meeting phase, or they had not gotten to the public meeting phase yet. So, I was kind of underemployed at this point, and I'm not enjoying it. So, I start sending out applications to schools to be a science teacher again, and I got an interview. About the time that I was trying to decide whether to go to this interview or not, I don't mean that minute, but in that time frame there, the Division of Visitor Services in Refuges got a new Division Chief. Her name was Cheryl Simpson. She came over from the Park Service and she was very enthusiastic. She was working to try to build the Division back up. There's some history there of how the Division kind of got broken apart at one point. So, she's coming in to try to build it back up. On her org chart, there's a box on that says Environmental Educator. So, I'm working in the Division of Planning and....

JOHN CORNELLY: Pouting, again.

GARRY TUCKER: Pouting, again. Yep. There's a theme here. So, I go to Cheryl, and I say, "I want that job." And she says, "Well, you know, it's a box on a piece of paper, but there's no money to go with it right now." So, I said, "Well, when there is some money, I want that job." She's struggling, trying to staff up, and so she goes to my supervisor in Planning, Dave Horning, and they work out a deal where I'm split between them 50/50. So, I continue doing some work in Planning and I work in Visitor Services for Cheryl. Somewhere in that, the funding became available so that they moved me full-time into Visitor Services. I don't know all the secrets there, but anyway, so I'm in Visitor Services full-time. This must be about 2000 or 2001, something like that. So, we're rocking along, enjoying working in Visitor Services. Cheryl Simpson, the Chief of Visitor Services, leaves, so the position is vacant, and I act in it for a short period of time. Then they're getting ready to advertise the position. I had no desire whatsoever to be Chief of Visitor Services. I have always viewed myself as a worker bee. You know, somebody tell me what needs to be done, and I'll figure out how to do it, but don't ask me to be the one to figure out what needs to be done. I'd rather be the worker. So anyway, I had no desire to be Chief of Visitor Services. I had two people that I respect have conversations with me. One person was Lynn Askins. Lynn is, I guess, currently Refuge Manager at Carolina Sandhills. I met her back when she was Assistant Manager at Bon Secour, maybe. I don't remember for sure. But anyway, Lynn and I are having a conversation at NCTC. I'm in Atlanta now. We're both back at NCTC for training, and we're sitting in the bar having a conversation, and she looks at me and she said, "Sometimes you have to step up and take your turn." That kind of set on me and, shortly thereafter, I'm having a conversation with Jim Burkhart. Jim Burkhart at that point was a legend in Visitor Services at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. And Jim said, "You need to apply for that job, because we need somebody like you to have that job." For Jim to say that, and for Lynn Askins to say, *you've got to step up and take your turn*, that is basically why I filled out the application and applied for the job. I don't know who all applied for it. The other thing that swayed me, that decided for me that I was going to apply for the job is that, in Region 4, at that time, in the Southeast Region, there was and still is an incredible set of Visitor Services folks out in the field. So, my goal in applying for that job was to do whatever I could to support those folks and help out people like Robin Will, Jim Burkhart, Dawn Whitmore, Bonnie Strawser, Gaye Brantley, Kay McCutcheon. These were and are the legends in Visitor Services in Region 4, and for me to be able to front for them and run interference for them was just an honor. So, I applied for the job, and I think I'm remembering right, Mitch King hired me. He was Chief of Refuges, at one point.

SANDY TUCKER: We had that ecosystem stuff for a while. GARD/PARD and all that. Now, was that right?

GARRY TUCKER: Somehow, Mitch was in charge of refuges at that point in some aspect, and he hired me. This would have been in... I don't remember. We'll have to check that and get back with you. So, I know at one point with turnover and everything, at one point between then and the time I retired, I was the longest serving Visitor Services Chief still standing.

JOHN CORNELLY: It's really good to have somebody with your attitude that that's how you would do it - to support and run interference for those Visitor Services people. Because my experience out west is it could be very different in the southeast. But when budget cuts came the visitor service people in the field were the first ones to go. And then the biologists were the second ones, you know.

GARRY TUCKER: And that's pretty much the way it is across the board. So, I'm Visitor Services Chief, and I have the privilege of working in the Regional Office. I've got Frank Podriznik and Richard Matteson, who were the holdovers from the original Visitor Services Program in the region. So, I got to learn a lot from them. Some things how you should do stuff and some things like maybe how you

shouldn't do stuff, but still appreciate them. Deborah Jerome was in Planning, and when Planning had a reorganization, Deborah came and worked with me in Visitor Services. I had the opportunity to hire Kyla Hastie. Let me back up. I didn't hire Kyla Hastie. Kyla Hastie was working for the Service in Sandy's office at that point, and we were going into the Centennial for Refugees, and Kyla became the Centennial Coordinator for Region 4. So, they housed her in my shop, at that point, and Kyla and I worked together for quite a while. Then, I hired from, I think she was in Denver at the time, Stacy Armitage, who went on to be a, gosh I think she's a Refuge Supervisor now, somewhere out west. I don't mean Refuge Supervisor. I mean, she's in a Regional Office as a zone supervisor. I hired Kevin Lowry, who is now Visitor Services Chief for Region 4, and I hired Sally Gentry. So, those were some people that worked with me in Visitor Services in the Southeast Region. All incredible. I think our goal of providing coverage and support to the folks out in the field, I think we kept that as our purpose. I think we did an okay job. We can always do things better.

One of the fun things that I got to do, I think it was maybe - I'll have to check dates and get back with you - but for those of you who know anything about the duck stamp, the duck stamp has a contest every year to pick the art for next year's duck stamp. And for years and years and years - well, forever - it was held in Main Interior in D.C. So, Ducks Unlimited, I believe that's right, encouraged the Service to bring it to Memphis, which is the home site for Ducks Unlimited. So, the first time that the Duck Stamp contest was held outside of D.C. in, I don't know, maybe forever, I don't know for sure, it was in Memphis, which is part of our region. So, Kyla Hastie and myself and some others helped work with the Duck Stamp office out of D.C. to bring the contest to Memphis. I think, well, maybe I shouldn't say this, I think Ducks Unlimited kind of had the idea that Memphis would become the new home of the Duck stamp contest. But other folks kind of wanted to have it, too. Long story short, the contest is now held throughout different regions every year or somewhere near D.C. one year and then every other year out to a different region. So, I got to go to the duck stamp contest when it was held in Memphis, and I fell in love with it. I just thought it was the coolest thing. At that time, I had a camera, so I took a bunch of pictures and did whatever I could do to make myself useful. And Laurie [Shaffer]...

JOHN CORNELLY: Suzanne?

GARRY TUCKER: Suzanne wasn't there then. The lawyer - who's the solicitor? I'll get them all for you. [Note: the solicitor for the contests was Larry Mellinger.]

JOHN CORNELLY: I am a Duck stamp judge, and I know these people. I can't remember, but we'll fill in those when we get the transcript.

GARRY TUCKER: Right. So, to make myself indispensable, I agreed that I would hold the bail money for all the people who were coming there to put on the duck stamp contest, and I would be the designated driver, also. I'm not sure if I'm supposed to say that or not, but I was a designated driver and I held the bail money. So, because of that, I got invited back the next year. We held it in Memphis, and then it was either the next year or the year after that was one of the anniversary events of the duck stamp, so Region 4 proposed that we hold it at Ding Darling refuge in Sanibel, because Ding Darling is the creator of the duck stamp. So, for three years in a row, I had reason to go and participate, officially. And because I weaseled my way into the good graces of the duck stamp folks, I've been invited back ever since. Every year that we have the duck stamp contest, I've been allowed to go. While I was working, my boss - whoever it happened to be at the time - would allow me to go officially and work the Duck Stamp [contest.] And now that I'm retired, the Duck Stamp Office still considers me a volunteer, so they bring me to help every year. That's where I met you.

JOHN CORNELLY: That's right.

GARRY TUCKER: It is one of the coolest stories in the Fish and Wildlife Service. So, if you don't know that story, you need to learn it.

JOHN CORNELLY: When it was held in Minneapolis, we had a reunion. You know how, when we went to Albuquerque, it was in conjunction with the Balloon Festival, and when we can, we try to do things like that. We were all encouraged to go over, and a lot of us did go over for part of it, but I still didn't have any idea what it was and what it was all about until I was asked to be an alternate [judge]. An alternate in case somebody else, one of the regulars, can't make it. You've got to be ready, so they take you through the whole process. And I thought, wow, this is something else, you know? Then, the next year I was a primary. But when I was an alternate in Ogden, Utah, that's when I met you.

GARRY TUCKER: That's right. Three years ago, now, I retired.

JOHN CORNELLY: Okay. You were the Chief of Visitor Services.

GARRY TUCKER: I was the Chief of Visitor Services for the Southeast Region. Sandy retired, and then I had a couple of years there where she was retired, and I was getting up every morning and going to work. So, I'm looking at this picture, and I started pouting again. (laughter) No. I loved my job. I had the best job in the Fish and Wildlife Service.

JOHN CORNELLY: No, no, I did.

GARRY TUCKER: You know, I had 130 plus refuges in the southeast that I got to support. And I had incredible Visitor Services people. The new crop is out there now, the Susie Heiseys and the Tony Westlands and [many others.] They're out there now filling in for Dorn and Bonnie and so, I got to support them.

JOHN CORNELLY: Well, I know you saw this happen. We have a lot of Visitor Services people now. It's really expanded, which is a good thing. When I started my career at Malheur, which is one of the big famous refuges, we had no Visitor Services person. So, we all rotated on weekends. When we were open on weekends, the whole staff took turns, and we probably did an okay job, but we weren't trained for that. Refuge biologists back in that day, their attitude was *well, that's somebody else's job*. But there wasn't somebody else to do it. So, we did a fair amount of it and actually enjoyed it. I think, as I travel around to these retiree reunions, and we go on tours and that sort of thing, and I was on the board of the Refuge Association for six years, and we went out and visited refuges, why it's so much better now in reaching so many more kids and the public. And I think that's a really good thing.

GARRY TUCKER: Yeah, I do too. I'm glad we understand that it is a people issue.

End of Interview

Key words: duck stamp, education, education outreach, environmental education, farms and farming, museums, planning, training, visitor services