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TONI THOMASSON: This is Toni Thomasson. Today is Tuesday, May 10, 2016. Today I'm interviewing for the first time architect Donna Carter. This interview is taking place at my home at 300 Bowie Street in Austin, Texas. This interview is being done for the Austin History Center and is one of a series of interviews with and about Austin, Travis County architects.

Hi. Donna.

DONNA CARTER: Hi, Toni.

THOMASSON: Let's start by having you tell me your full name and when and where you were born.

CARTER: My name is Donna Dean Carter, and I was born in Dayton, Ohio, June 18, 1952.

THOMASSON: And did you grow up there or did you grow up somewhere else?

CARTER: I grew up really up until I was about age six in several different places. So I lived in Dayton, Ohio for three or four years, then moved to Englewood, New Jersey and then finally moved up to Sudbury, Massachusetts, where I spent most of my childhood and then teenage years before I went to college.

THOMASSON: Okay.

Tell me about when you first knew you wanted to be an architect.

CARTER: I didn't really know I wanted to be an architect until after I said I was majoring in architecture in a school that had no majors. So I went to Yale University as an undergraduate and this was during sort of the end of the 1960s. My first year there was 1970, and so it was a tumultuous time and we were coming off of the Black Panther trials in New Haven. New Haven was a somewhat volatile place. It was also during—at the end of urban renewal where big swaths of cities had been totally removed and so in New Haven they were replaced by highways as they were in many and most places, and it was the Oak Street connector. It was the street to nowhere. It literally just went up into the air and stopped.

But I actually was a graphic artist. I liked to do things with color. I liked to do things with line and there had been some fairly famous graphic designers and graphic artists that had gone through Yale, so it had a pretty nice curriculum around that.

And so my problem during that time was: how do I justify sitting in a room with a ruler and pen and drawing (Thomasson laughs) very precise red lines (laughs) that merged into blue lines upon a piece of paper when there was sort of all this turmoil out behind me and around me. And so, it was really kind of: what can you do, you know?

And I also saw that people were struggling. It seemed to me that places were being removed, and I sort of didn't understand. I didn't know what all of that was, but I did start taking planning—and the great thing about Yale is you do not have to have a major. You basically have to take x-number of courses during the four years, and they let you out and they give you a degree and it's really wonderful.

So you can study, and it means you can—as long as you don't fail at too many things—you can take courses that you really don't know if that's what you want to do. So consequently, Vincent Scully's classes were filled with people that were really pre-med because they just found that—they knew it was a great course to take. So that's really the wonderful thing about being at that type of an institution.

But I really felt I needed to do something, unlike many people of my generation, I am not a first generation college student. Both of my parents were educated. Both—my father was an attorney, so he had an advanced degree. My mother taught English, and they always expected me to do better than they did, and so since my father was already an attorney, my mother said, "You have to be a doctor." (Both laugh, undecipherable) —oh, okay. So I did have this pressure of what could I do? And so quite honestly, it was a situation it seemed to me that architecture was a sort of intersection of visual things, you know, a visual order. It was also—seemed to be able to affect how people lived and how people felt about what they lived. And we were going through policy changes, so that with urban design and city planning, whether it was the physical side of that or the policy side of that, it was really kind of a way to pull all of that together.

And then, of course, you're eighteen, nineteen, and there's always a significant other involved, and so there was a guy that was in architecture school, and it was very interesting to see what he was doing and what, you know, what that could be. So it was really through that that I said, "Oh. Architecture. That really is something that might bring all of these things together," and so really kind of began to think about it for the first time. And I was really—at that time I was, like, nineteen years old, and I'd really never thought of architecture as a profession.

THOMASSON: So you went on beyond Yale then. Tell me about that.

CARTER: Well, probably need to back up a little bit. Yale was very interesting but it was also—as a high school student, I'd actually gone to school in England for a year, first as an exchange student but then I stayed on and did my A levels in England. One of the fascinating things about that coming from New England, where things are really quite old compared to most things in the United States—the church I went to was from 1629. You know, sort of, go to England, everything is, you know, 900. And there are fascinating things. There are fascinating churches that are just sort of crumbling in a field. There's wood that goes back to 1000, 1100, and it's still—you can still see the carving. You can still feel it, and so I'd seen parts of the world. I had actually traveled to Poland and I'd traveled to Italy during that time as a high school student.

When I got to Yale, I just quite honestly just got a little wanderlust and said I needed to leave. And so my junior year I went to school in Cairo at the American University, and there the culture and everything including the buildings were very different. At that point I was interested in architecture, and I decided this may be a way to do it, but the architecture there and the architecture of the villages I just found very intriguing.

So I studied that. I studied also what was happening with the building of the Aswan Dam, with the relocation of the people, with the saving of ancient artifacts, those that they decided not to save and how did they make that decision. So I really kind of just got interested in what to do, and so I took some time off and went to the American University, came back.

And so after Yale, I decided I've been on the East Coast too long. What I really want to do is see a little bit more of the U.S. I'd seen a fair amount of the world—or what I thought of the world at that time. So I went to graduate school in California and got my first taste of defeat in a sense because as a—oh, you went to Yale, well, that's not a professional degree, it's not an architecture major, you just took courses. So you have to start from ground zero, and so it meant—and they have a program for that. They actually have older students that come in that start—but it's a three-year program.

And I said, "But, I've taken calculus, I've taken structures. I've taken—because I've done a lot of the prerequisites," and so I sort of traveled through and made some enemies, made quite a few friends, but got out in two years just because I wanted to get out (undecipherable, laughs). So I did get my master's from the University of California at Berkeley.

THOMASSON: And when did you come to Austin?

CARTER: Well, I've been a resident—I've had a Texas driver's license since '73, so I guess you could say I was a resident and started voting in '73. But I hadn't graduated yet. Basically, my husband worked at the University of Texas, was a professor of classics, and so really from '73 to '77, I was in and out of Austin. I remained in New Haven to finish up my degree there, came and lived in Austin for a year, then went out to Berkeley to get my graduate degree.

My husband followed me out to Berkeley (laughs) for a little while and then he came back.

THOMASSON: So what year did y'all get married?

CARTER: We got married in '74.

THOMASSON: Okay.

Tell me—I mean, we know you have your own firm and you've had your firm. Were there jobs you worked for other people before you had your own firm?

CARTER: I think probably—I think everybody in Austin of my age and vintage has probably worked for one of three firms, and so that is a kind of funny story. Technically, my first job was with 3D International. But 3D International had just acquired Brooks Barr Graeber and White at that time, and so I'd actually been hired by David Graeber (laughs) as part of Brooks Barr Graeber and White unbeknownst to anybody. So I sort of (undecipherable) came in and said, "Well, who is this person?" So I worked there. Then when they actually started Graeber Simmons and Cowan, I stayed with them, so I was one of the first ones that went—two employees or three employees or three architectural employees when they first started. So I was one of those first employees and stayed with them for several years.

THOMASSON: Is that the only firm?

CARTER: And that really is the only—

THOMASSON: And that's where we met at Graeber Simmons and Cowan.

CARTER: Right.

THOMASSON: So you started your firm in what year approximately?

CARTER: I started—I did—I left Graeber Simmons and Cowan in sort of 1981, the fall of 1981, and I did some residential projects. I basically took some time off to study for the exam. I figured—by that time I had a child and I just couldn't see how I was going to fit all of that into getting registered. So took that time off. I did do some residential projects, and after I became licensed, then I started my own firm with the mistaken notion that it would give me more time and freedom and a life (undecipherable, both laugh)

THOMASSON: That didn't turn out to be. (laughs)

CARTER: Did not turn out to be the case, but anyway, that's—

THOMASSON: And you had a partner originally, right?

CARTER: Right. My partner was Ruth Parshall, another woman, and we had the partnership for about three years, three and a half, almost four years.

THOMASSON: Okay.

Tell me what or who has inspired you in your career.

CARTER: I think in some ways the inspiration—and this—I mean, it sounds worse and way cornier than it really is. The inspiration has really been that a kind of faith that things can be better and that the way things are better are people working together and working at something that they feel they're good at. You don't necessarily know how that's going to fit into the bigger picture, but just sort of having this faith that if you do this and do it somewhat well, that it will contribute to the greater good. And so for me, you know, everybody has the same sort of sense. I mean, I looked at my parents and what they had done and what they had been through and the way they did things. That gave me a lot of inspiration and it gave me a lot of support. They could've held me back in so many different ways but they didn't do it.

And seems like at each point I would meet someone that would enable me to do something. My husband's been a huge enabler, allowed me to make mistakes, allowed me not necessarily to have to feed myself during all these times and being very understanding of that. There were professors obviously at the university, many of them were on the fringes of architecture, and it was that fringe between architecture, being a social activist, being engaged in community, from Sara Ishikawa, Charles Alexander. But then, even someone like Vince Scully in the way that he could look things and then on other side looking at other cultures. So learning about African art, learning about Oceana, those kinds of—so those were really the inspirations for—

THOMASSON: They gave you energy.

CARTER: Right. And sort of said, okay, you can do something.

THOMASSON: Yeah.

Well, I know this is probably quite a lot of things you've done in the realm of Austin, Travis County boards, commissions, volunteer work. It kind of ties in to what you're saying about that fringe.

CARTER: Right. But I was young and had a lot of energy. A lot of my work in Austin had to do, obviously, with the growth of the city, and this was during times when we had great growth and times when we had no growth and times when we had the savings and loan bust and we were just down. It's a continuing disparity we have between East and West and our ethnic and minority communities.

But I was on the Downtown Revitalization Task Force—mostly it was taskforces. I didn't actually get sworn in as a commissioner. It also meant that your penance was a lot longer because you had no term. I mean, it was, like, you had a task to do and these were big tasks that didn't get done.

THOMASON: It sounds deceivingly short— (Both laugh) But it's actually forever.

CARTER: it was actually forever. Worked on this many, many moons ago the Land Development Code, the precursor to what has morphed into probably one of the most difficult (laughs) things to deal with, and we're obviously now trying to ratchet that back. But in that process got involved with RUDAT with the AIA and wasn't involved in the first application, but then as they were—I was working on a plan for East 11th and 12th Street, and so probably through that capacity, was involved with setting up all the information that we gave the people that came in that were going to kind of help us. Interestingly enough—I mean, that RUDAT has sort of continued even on today. We continue to have updates, try to see what we have done. We were lucky enough to have a mayor in Kirk Watson that said, "You know, by golly, this is a blueprint for what we can do with our downtown." And so what we're seeing downtown today is very much a direct response to that and we're still using it. So that's something.

I was also on the Mueller Commission as we were transitioning from the vision that had been worked on for—what—twenty years by the residents around the Old Mueller Airport. Now that it is going to be released to private development, how does that happen? And so really the first part was: how would, technically a PUD. How did that fit into the ordinances? What were going to be the development conditions and regulations that would go along with this release? How do you address long-term affordability?

I guess at best I'm a pessimist, at worst I'm cynic. It seems to me we never address the really hard things, things like long-term affordability. We don't want to take—the short answer and the short-term always seems easier. And no one seems to remember that a dollar spent today is still—even if it's a billion dollars—it's still a lot cheaper than trying to spend that billion dollars in ten years. It would buy you so much more now if you bite the bullet and do what you need to do to get that infrastructure in. So those are always the sort of down sides of working on all of these things.

In the private side, the thing that's actually kept me energized is I truly believe that everyone has certain rights and that we as a community—if we are a good and just community—we need to make sure our fellow people have this, and to me it's a home over their head, it's access to health care and access to food, access to education. That's the only way we can thrive as a community, so I did spend a lot of time working first with Seton when it was really just a hospital

and Holy Cross Hospital when it was still there, and then as they went on to form networks and now at the Ascension, which is a very broad network, but working with healthcare and really that's the safety net. What does it mean? Quite honestly, when you have a religious organization taking on a safety net, a hospital in a community that has the diversity of people that we have there, making sure that there's a voice that's speaking for the diverse population and trying to navigate so that everyone feels that they have fulfilled their own personal ethic and moral obligations. So that's really kind of the things that have filled my time.

I've worked on state—been on the Texas Historical Commission, which, again, being comfortable and understanding and knowing where your past fits into your future, to me, is something that too is very important because I come from a people that have—there are roots who were torn from us. So we have a very young history here, and it's one that is constantly being manipulated and kind of taken away as well. So there's—it lends to an aspect of homelessness.

THOMASSON: Um hmm. And do you think you became aware of that at that time when you were in England and seeing all the older—really old ruins?

CARTER: I became—when I was in England it was 1968. It was the Kent States. It was—we didn't talk very much about Jackson State, where the black students were killed. It was the trials and everything and it was the Vietnam War.

THOMASSON: Um hmm. That's right.

CARTER: So it was all of that, and we had the summer of love. I mean, so you had all of that. That was just sort of fomenting and turning around and shaping us. Yet I personally as a young African-American and still a teenager didn't know where I belonged. Was I going to be—could I be a hippie? Well, no, I couldn't grow my hair (Thomasson laughs) out that long. Was I going to go to Jackson State? Would I go to—my mother was a graduate of Hampton Institute—would I go to a HBCU? She said, "No! We're in New England. You're going to go to an Ivy League school!" I mean, it was, like, you know, it was inculcated in me that for them this was the age of integration. And so that—we moved into basically a suburb in town.

And so I go to England and I'm feeling like I don't feel American. I don't feel like I'm the flag-carrying—

THOMASSON: I see.

CARTER: —U.S. American. I'm something other. And I go there and they look at me and they say, Oh, you're American. And so that juxtaposition of they instantly

know I'm American, I'm not sure. You know, why didn't you think I'm from Africa? Well, because you don't speak like that, you don't look like that, your clothes. I mean, everything about me said American. Yet I felt that if I went back home, they wouldn't think that I was an American.

THOMASSON: Interesting.

CARTER: So it's a feeling of homelessness, it's a feeling of where is the community that says since we're all a nation of homeless people, of nationless people, but we've come together and we've come together because our Constitution says that, because that's what our Founding Fathers who had slaves with all of that complication still said that all men are created equal, and so what does that mean as a community? So that's fed a lot of what I do and in that sense how I see architecture.

THOMASSON: Yeah, I see.

Tell me about some of your projects around Austin and Travis County.

CARTER: Again, in a city that's had huge developments and then huge busts, having a small firm trying to sort of keep it going month to month to month, I fought very hard, worked with the various groups so that we would have goals for minority participation in public contracts. So many of my works have been public works, whether for the county, whether for the City of Austin, or for the state.

So the projects I've worked on: I've worked on a lot of fire stations. (laughs)

THOMASSON: Some historic.

CARTER: And then obviously some historic projects. And some of the historic projects I've worked on are ones that people wouldn't even know. I mean, when the Howson Community Center in East Austin—we all know the name, Elizabeth Howson from the Howson Library and then on the West Side. But when the community center—it was just crumbling into the ground in the '80s, so we restored that building.

Had a plan for restoring the old Kealing Junior High and it mysteriously burned down in the middle of the night (Both laugh) in the 1980s.

I worked on the historical Haehnel Grocery Store, which for a while, probably everyone knows it as Shorty's Bar and it was—

THOMASSON: Oh, where is that? What street?

CARTER: It's on the corner of—I always get my—I think it's Waller and 11th. It was a home for a while for Balcones Recycling once it got restored.

THOMASSON: Okay.

CARTER: But even through the '80s, an old family member of Haehnel — descendant of Haehnel had the building and we kind of kept it propped up for about ten years. We put a new roof on it and replaced a lot of the rotten wood. Shorty would still have his bar in the front and he had a Cadillac with "Shorty" on his license plate. And you know, most people would find it scary but in the end it really was a neighborhood bar. Yeah, there were some nefarious things going on outside, but it wasn't unsafe. I never felt—and I walked that street—I was seven months pregnant with my second child and I did not feel threatened in no way, shape, or form. But we did restore that building there.

Obviously, we were the architects for the Carver Library and the Genealogy Center, which was the restoration of the original branch library that was moved from downtown to Angelina Street to become the first branch library for colored people.

And then we built the museum as well.

So those are obviously important projects. So I think probably my most important project, again, was a planning project, and it's actually probably the thing I'm most proud of and it was never accepted. The city put it on a shelf, but if you read it today, a lot of what we're seeing, good and bad, was talked about in that plan. And some of the bad things that we're seeing, I think if we had taken some of the sort of policy challenges and worked with them early on, we wouldn't have that.

THOMASSON: Is that 11th and 12th Street?

CARTER: It's 11th and 12th Street, and it was commercial development, but we talked about the development of an historic district. We wanted St. Bernard to be an historic district. We noted a lot of historic houses now at Juniper, which is an historic district. But we talked about having regional nodes at the interstate trying to make the interstate both a buffer but an entrance. Well, of course, that happened. They put the gateway up.

We talked about mixed use buildings. We were a little more gentle. We were talking about some three-story buildings, but we were talking about community parking. That still hasn't been cracked over there. But, again, we said as a policy, parking needs to be a shared commodity. We need to figure out a

way to compensate people because they are going to be building it. But it needs to be—people need to be able to walk. You shouldn't have to drive because now I'm going to the next store.

THOMASSON: Right.

CARTER: We actually—before we even knew what it was called—talked about form based code. We had actually an algorhythm that we worked with a market person about increasing the density of—the residential density could be increased fourfold with simply using the form of a main house, a garage, garage apartment. And you could park it, you would have more people, it would give the density to have things like grocery stores, and service, small service, and so you wouldn't have the need for the regional retail to come into the neighborhood—

THOMASSON: Yeah. Big boxes.

CARTER: But that was 1982. So it's something I'm proud of, something no one will ever know I did anything (laughs) to

THOMASSON: Influence.

CARTER: —to influence anything. But to me, I think it has been an influence.

THOMASSON: So your plan never got adopted officially.

CARTER: It was accepted by the city council by 1983.

THOMASSON: And yet a lot of it's been implemented.

CARTER: They did another plan in the '90s, the Community Redevelopment Plan.

THOMASSON: Okay.

CARTER: And obviously at that point they were looking—because there'd been plans by Haywood Jordan and McCowan out of San Antonio. We had started—there had been a CDBG plan that kind of came after urban renewal, which had already wiped out a fair number of the (Narrator is saying, "Quote unquote,") "dilapidated housing." So they took those plans and obviously people had those as resources.

THOMASSON: Plenty of plans. (laughs)

CARTER: They had plenty of plans, and they did at that point do a redevelopment authority, the Austin Revitalization Authority. And whether they read it in the plan or not, all I can say is it's in the 1982-'83 plan that you were going to need that. I went a little bit further. I said, "You're going to need a community land trust. You also need a development organization that can hold land," which they tried to do with ARA, that they could hold land, they could develop it, they could release it at the schedule. So my feeling is—and even now people are talking to me about what can happen on the education and business side, and I said, "Look, what you really need, you just need to read it right here. I've said, 'Data and communication are going to be something for the future.'" And that what you need to figure is what's the backbone of that. What's the production values? How do you teach that? Where does Houston Tillotson fit in to that picture—

THOMASSON: As a resource.

CARTER: —as a resource? So, yeah, players.

And, yeah, this was before the Internet. It was typed though, you know, on a sewing machine computer and we thought we were fancy. Things were taped. The pictures were taped onto the page. So this was a long time ago. (laughs) It's a generation ago.

THOMASSON: Do we have a copy of your plan at the Architectural Archives, do you think?

CARTER: I believe you—I think it is in the History Center.

THOMASSON: I'll look and see. That would be good for us to have.

CARTER: And that was done as a joint venture with—I think it was Kinney Kaler and Crews at the time, but it was Girard Kinney.

THOMASSON: Okay.

And is that the project you feel had the greatest—that you've done—that you would say had the greatest impact in Austin and its built environment?

CARTER: Well, in some ways probably the work that I did and my volunteer efforts with RUDAT probably had the most—

THOMASSON: Oh, the broadest.

CARTER: —it's the broadest and whatever. I will probably never be able to say there's a cause and effect to that plan, but to me why I value it, it means that my thought process has been validated.

THOMASSON: It was personally satisfying.

CARTER: It was personally satisfying to see that what I was thinking in '82, there's some merit in that.

THOMASSON: I see. Sure. Um hmm.

CARTER: And a merit that's been shown over time.

THOMASSON: Right.

CARTER: And probably another plan, again—and in that sense I don't think it's been influential mainly because I don't think it's been read by many people—but as we all know in trying to get transportation options in Austin, we have sputtered through light rail, rapid bus, mass transit options for this community. The first one I started with and my employee, who has gone on to an illustrious career with the city, was Kalpana Sutaria and she was an employee of mine—

THOMASSON: Oh, that's right.

COFFEE: —and worked on the first—and it was really an environmental impact, so we did cultural and visual and design implications of doing—and if you look at the route—and that was in 1986 maybe, '87—if you look at the route, it's the same route we're still— (laughs, undecipherable) They moved it a little bit here and you go to Mueller and they moved it a little bit over here to take in more downtown, but we were looking at Lamar, you're looking at the rail lines that we have. We're looking at South Congress, and that started there.

In 19—I believe it was 1996—and my dates are always wrong, so and as a historic architect, I should be much better at this but I'm not—we actually did planning for all the station areas along a proposed light rail. And that was not a successful project. I think my client, Capital Metro, didn't like me. I think the city, who was not a client but came in kind of—they didn't like me. But I kind of—and we had a very large team, and it was very interesting and it was very clear to us that if you tried to develop a rail line, that policies in the city would have to change, that where parking was, how you encouraged cars or no cars—and this was in the era where, oh, we'll have—capture parking around the edge and we'll bring cars around the edge. So we did the plan we were supposed to do. We did the illustrations of the park and rides, we did kiss and rides, we did little transit nodes, all very primitive first blush at things now we almost take for granted.

But in that we also issued a set of little policy notebooks that said, “If this is to be successful, these are the kinds of policies that would have to come into place.”

And there might be some areas of innovation. Like, maybe you have a thing where you can park a car but you have some sort of card or something that when you get downtown you can get another car downtown and then you return it there. Well, this was before zip cars, it was before cars to go and ridesharing. It was before any of these things, but perhaps there could be an electric jitney service, you know. We try to put hardwire in downtown, it’s too inflexible and too expensive. Even routes if they don’t pay for themselves, have to be moved around. But what if we just had just like in a parking, we had a golf course or a shopping mall for convenience, just a little electric cart? You know, you can make four people, eight people, twelve people, and they can move and change.

And then there was development. These rules for development really will have to change. And we literally wrote them in little notebooks and said, “This is Policy 1,” “Policy 2,” and this goes with this, and they hated us. I don’t think anyone’s read it. I think it would be—and I actually haven’t gone back and collected them all into, like, one place—I think it would be very interesting.

THOMASSON: It would.

CARTER: And I think, again, I think I would be satisfied because I think some of it makes a whole lot of sense and some of it is now being done.

THOMASSON: Um hmm. Yeah.

Did you ever have a favorite client?

CARTER: I have a favorite client right now, not in Austin, and it’s a family. They are the Odom family. They hail from far, far, far East Texas almost Louisiana. The only place to stay is in Jasper. Now, that frightened me. (laughs)

THOMASSON: Yes.

CARTER: That frightened me.

THOMASSON: They don’t have a good reputation, I’m afraid.

CARTER: It does not have a good reputation. But they are an African-American family and they’ve very tight-knit, very close. They hated some of the people they married into. There’re been all kinds of fights, all kinds of (undecipherable). The

direct Odom line, as it can tie themselves to the Odoms have stuck together. And in that it turned out that they were leaders and statesmen in a community that was probably a tenant farm—I'm still trying to piece together how it started—but a tenant farming community in East Texas. So this is about eighteen miles further east from Jasper into the woods in Newton County.

This town called Shankleville—and due to their preservation efforts, now it's now on the East Texas, Texas Historical Commission Trail and it's—if you go to Bing and type in Shankleville, Texas, it'll pop up as a historic community and a place you can go to now.

And it was a fairly large community. It had an elementary school. They have two schools, so basically, they have kind of a high school and almost into a normal school, and then everything underneath. So there are two buildings. They had several churches. There were some feuds, so they had several churches, two churches and two cemeteries, and then they had homesteads and farmland, and then people went off and worked in the logging industry as well.

Well, this family has kept seven acres, and on that seven acres is a house that my client—her great-grandfather—I mean, I'm sorry—her grandfather built, and she remembers going there for homecoming. And it's a place they still use.

So they're restoring the homestead. They had stores. The store building is gone. There's really only one church left. The two cemeteries are still there. One is not on property that they own. One is on property they own. The homestead is there. The building that was really kind of a utility building—it was called Noah's Ark—it's there. There's a smokehouse and a meat house, chicken coop, a corn crib or a barn crib, and so they want to preserve that as a place where—eventually turn it into a heritage tourism—

THOMASSON: Educational—

CARTER: —educational site, but also a place that other families can use for a reunion. They had a reunion sycamore tree that was on its—towards the end of its life. They had A&M come up and graft from that tree, so that they could have— (overlapping conversation)

THOMASSON: A son of the sycamore—of the original sycamore.

CARTER: So they've been very interesting and very, very tied to that land. They all go back for homecoming. They started something called the Purple Hull Pea Festival in June, and they've gotten interested in both the kitchen gardens as well as the farming gardens that they had. There's a spring on the site. We've

engaged some amateur state archeologists that are coming in to collect what we're finding as we go through.

But for me—in light of the best clients—most of the work that I've done has been pro bono. To be honest, it's their attitude. It's—they're doing some of the work themselves. They do take guidance (laughs) from the restoration architect. Most of the time they do, sometimes they don't, but they—and then the elders are bringing the kids—when the kids are about seventeen or—you know, when they're teenagers they start working. The little kids, sometimes they go around and pick stuff up, but they're there. They're not whining, they're not—they understand. You know, they're kids, I mean, you know, yeah, there's some crying but it's all done because this is something that the family is going to do. And so that's just been wonderful.

THOMASSON: I can see why you'd enjoy that. Yeah. That's great.

Do you in your firm have a preference for the business side versus design side?

CARTER: I personally like the design side, but I spend all my time on business.

THOMASSON: Yes.

CARTER: So my firm is vey small, and I have three people that have been with me for over ten years and two people have been with me close to twenty years.

And so my method of design right now is—and it's got a little worse because we rely more on computers—but basically, I would take something about the size of that pink Post-It Note and I would draw a very tiny little sketch—

THOMASSON: Just about 2 inches by 2 inches.

CARTER: Right. I'd draw a very tiny little sketch, and I'd just put it on someone's desk, or—especially the two people that have worked with me the longest, and they might be working on something, and they would just get another index card with a piece of a sketch on it, or this is the detail, or this is—and it was that kind of almost iterative design process. And that allowed me even though basically I was just trying to balance the books and write contracts and get new work, which seems to be 30 percent of the time or 50 percent of the time.

So I always felt that I had a hand in—for better or for worse—in the design. And I also felt when I didn't have a hand in and a few times when I didn't things went horribly wrong, and some of that it probably didn't go horribly wrong but I felt it went horribly wrong.

THOMASSON: It wasn't what you expected.

CARTER: It wasn't what I expected, and I wasn't happy with it, and I knew ultimately I needed—I had to take responsibility for it because my name was still on the document.

So I like design but I'm not—as I said, I came in from graphic artist, so I'm not a live artist. I'm a terrible artist. I've astigmatism so nothing is straight. They also have to learn to tilt everything 18 degrees to the left because otherwise it wouldn't be straight.

But to me, it's—so I've always been either the really big picture of how things need to go together or the absolute detail. So it's the middle part that I've been—I really need and value the collaboration in the middle to get the things to work and to make sure I've kept the code in mind and all of the things that people often don't think about when they think about architecture that really do have to work.

THOMASSON: But obviously those people who have been there ten or twenty years must like that piece of the process in working with you.

CARTER: I think what they like is that I think they can always see themselves in it as well. I mean, we're all ego-driven to a certain degree but I don't think I'm an ego-driven architect. I don't think—I mean, I've always said that for better or for worse, I get to walk away from every project I do. My client does not. My client has to live there. They have to work there. They have to take care of it. They in the end need to be satisfied, and if they're not, then I've failed at something.

If I've a favorite type of—I've always been this way with International Bauhaus House, very cold, straight-lined, I was the graphic—I was the ruling graphic artist. (Thomasson laughs) I was going to make those things fit on that page no matter what.

My formative years were during the five, like—the white architects.

THOMASSON: No crumpling up paper. (laughs)

CARTER: No, and making sure the computer could put it together.

THOMASSON: Draw that.

CARTER: No parametric scaling of the exterior of the building, no. It was like Richard Meyer talking about redoing a Connecticut house for a family that had

teenagers, and he put in, like, four under-counter refrigerators because he didn't want a vertical refrigerator to break the horizontal line of the kitchen. Well, that's nonsense, I'm sorry. It's beautiful but it's nonsense.

THOMASSON: Looks good in the magazine.

CARTER: And it looks fabulous in the magazine, yeah. To me, it's, okay, by the look and turn a corner, where does a vertical line make sense? Okay, well, then, maybe that's how we fashion the kitchen.

THOMASSON: What would you say have been the highlights of your career?

CARTER: The one that I didn't expect was being elevated to the College of Fellows. To me—and you can edit this out later—(laughs)—the College of Fellows—I'm sort of like Woody Allen. I really never want to belong to a club that would allow me to be in the club. (Thomasson laughs) And the fact that you're not just tapped one day—that's the great thing about secret societies, they just sort of come and tap you and say, now you're a member.

One of the things that I don't like about being an architect is that it's a lot of self-promotion. It's not in my—maybe it is in my DNA, but it is—

THOMASSON: It doesn't come naturally.

CARTER: —it does not come naturally. It is not something that I want, and to me if what I do is valuable, someone will notice that and someone will say that, and if they want to give me something to acknowledge that, then that would be great, but for me to spend all of that time—so I rationalized it by this will make my mother really happy.

THOMASSON: It is a lot of work to put together those binders.

CARTER: It is. And it's a lot of—for many because I also feel that most of my best work has been done with other people—it is me working with other people, it's me being part of a community, it's a team, and I'm not the best thing since sliced bread. So that whole thing is just so antithetical and when you think about all of the—many of the awards in our profession, whether in design awards or any other recognition, it's something that's initiated by you or your firm in one way, shape, or form.

THOMASSON: They have people in their firms dedicated to that purpose.

CARTER: Dedicated to getting that done. And it's great and I've always liked to see what other people are doing and how they get it done. It's not me. But getting

that and now—what I also want to say—okay, well, what does that mean to the profession to have this College of Fellows?

When I started, I sort of felt it was kind of like a good old guys club. And I still think that's probably where it started as much as many of my colleagues would say, no, no, no, Donna, that's terrible. That's sacrilege, you can't say that. But, you know, I just sort of think of bourbon and cigars. (laughs)

THOMASSON: Yeah, in a club.

CARTER: Yeah, in a club.

Obviously, now we do scholarships, we work with it. But I honestly don't think we do enough. I think we need to—and I think in some ways Austin has a very active group. They try to get together. They try to—I know we've had people that have had just great ideas about—we're in Austin, we see each other. How can we help a rural architect who doesn't have a big social set of their peers around them? So there's a lot of good that can come out of that.

THOMASSON: I'm happy to hear that, but it seems like a newer development because in past years I don't think that was always true.

CARTER: Well, I know Heather McKinney has been—and she may have even thought it up—I mean, been really active.

THOMASSON: That's great.

CARTER: So I think Austin's been really fortunate to have—I mean, they'd be good no matter who, what, male, female, hippopotamus. They really—we've just had some really dynamite people and—

THOMASSON: Leaders.

CARTER: —leaders. Very fortunate.

THOMASSON: And of course part of it is we have so many more Fellows now. In the past sometimes you only had a few Fellows still living at one time, but it's helped that we've grown.

CARTER: It is the daunting thing now, and I used to think of being sixty as old, and now that's just a—

THOMASSON: Spring chicken.

CARTER: Exactly.

THOMASSON: So I probably know the answer to this, are you a sketcher?

CARTER: (laughs) Actually I am, yes and no. So I'm not someone who just always has a sketch book and—

THOMASSON: Travel.

CARTER: —and travels. I'm not a Tom Shefelman in any way, shape, or form But I do—I jot things down, and I jot things down. Sometimes they're graphic, sometimes they're words, and sometimes they're a combination of graphics and words.

THOMASSON: Um hmm. So you do keep a notebook with you at all times?

CARTER: I don't keep a notebook with me at all times. I will come back and do—so it's more literally a notebook, and that's one of my—so I actually—and may never be able to have one again—but I actually use a Samsung tablet as well. So I actually—it has a stylus and I will sketch in that. And it's very easy to do, but they're not supporting it anymore, so who knows.

THOMASSON: Oh, well, there'll be something else come along.

CARTER: There'll be something else, but this is lightweight and just real easy and with enough page space. It's not like a phone. They are continuing to make the phone, but they're just not really supporting this tablet. There have been—so I'm a little bummed about that.

THOMASSON: Tell me about your typical day. Do you have a ritual?

CARTER: Now that I'm old? (Thomasson laughs) A typical day is going to the chiropractor.

THOMASSON: (laughs) Check your medications.

CARTER: (laughs) Check my medications, go to the gym. (laughs)

THOMASSON: And then you're finally ready to start the day.

CARTER: I will be ready to start the day. (Both laugh) Eat my banana. Make sure everything is—check my blood pressure—make sure everything is okay, and then I'd go to the office. Ideally now the way it works is that I would have gone to the gym, I would have left my car at the office, I would've walked home,

do what I need to do, and then walk back to the office, so that I actually get a little bit more exercise and just be able to stop and think.

But most of the time it is reading emails. Again, I try not to read emails all day long, so I tend to bunch it up. And then it's making sure that things have gone the way they should, kind of keeping tabs on a calendar and which projects are bubbling up or bubbling down. It depends—things get very cyclical. If we have things under construction, then tend to try to go out if I can and see things.

Right now we have a fair number of projects in East Texas, so there's some travel. And then that rearranges what happens later on.

Unfortunately, it's a long day. I usually don't get home until about eight o'clock.

THOMASSON: When you look back at your early part of your career, was there a project or a moment where you thought, Oh, I've made the right decision to go down this path?

CARTER: Well, you know, it's—

THOMASSON: Or did you always feel that that was the right thing?

CARTER: You know, it was funny. When I started—when we moved to Texas, we really thought we weren't going to stay here. We're both from the Northeast. We had both lived in small towns and in big cities. Austin was kind of neither of those, but my husband being a classicist, those jobs are not everywhere. And Texas was large. It could support the humanities at least at that time, and there was a little bit of a purge going on with Silber. (Both laugh) But anyway, that's another story. So we always thought, well, I could find a job anywhere and we could pick up stakes and I could go to Boston or I could go work at a firm, I could do this.

Then when I started my own firm, I suddenly realized that, well that I really couldn't pick up and do. Yet, it was also the first time that I could really just leave the office because not even something had happened just because I wanted to be able to spend that time with one of the children or go away very suddenly and just leave for three or four days. I suddenly realized that whether it's directly related to architecture or directly related to my situation that this was probably a good life—

THOMASSON: The right balance.

CARTER: —and not necessarily the right balance now because I think anyone from people in my office to my family will say that I work too hard, work—I'm sort of a workaholic. But somehow that made sense to me. I think for anyone anytime the first thing that you build that you actually see coming up out of the ground—and obviously, I did a lot of remodeling, but the first time you're looking at a bare piece of land—

THOMASSON: It's brand new.

CARTER: —it's brand new and there are forms in the ground and the trucks come and start to pour concrete, I mean, suddenly it hits you, this is going to be something. And you realize you like that. So, that—I think there was—

THOMASSON: When that happened, you knew.

CARTER: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

THOMASSON: Is there a time in your career that you would say things have been the most challenging?

CARTER: Obviously—I don't remember the '80s at all. People keep saying, Oh, that music, that's just because you. I just don't.

THOMASSON: No, I don't remember the '80s.

CARTER: (laughs) I don't remember.

THOMASSON: It's because we had children.

CARTER: Right. The kids were little. I just—I don't remember them. Maybe when I get old and everything—today doesn't matter but yesterday does. So that was clearly a challenge and it was a challenge at the office, it was a challenge to my marriage, it was a challenge with the kids.

And at the very beginning, there were lots of challenges. Going on to a construction site and having people make comments like, sorry, we don't have any watermelon today, or seeing horribly graphic cartoons written on a stud, nasty names written on parts of the construction, people not talking to you. So that can be very debilitating.

THOMASSON: Sure. That's horrible.

CARTER: And that was a lot of the atmosphere probably into the early '90s even you could go onto a site, even—I had to work through large projects where clearly the superintendent did not want to—

THOMASSON: Communicate.

CARTER: —communicate.

THOMASSON: Yeah. That's definitely a challenge.

CARTER: And that's a challenge, and quite honestly I don't ever know whether that's a challenge I'll meet tomorrow—I mean, it's not that it's totally gone away. So at any time—and the big issue is—and not that there's only one way to deal with anything—but the big issue is: are you going to let that define you? And I have to admit I'm a non-confrontational person. So I will take it and I'll try to work around it. I am not the protestor with the sign in your face all the time. Yeah, I may carry one every once in a while, but then you have to create ways of dealing with it that you feel still has some—that leave you with some integrity. And that for me has always been a challenge.

THOMASSON: Um hmm.

So coping with that—with the—what—sending someone else in at times?

CARTER: No, usually coping with that is—as you said when we were talking—is trying to be the best—much, much better than they are. Now, at times it gets spiteful, I just start stringing together words that I am pretty sure they have no idea what they mean. That doesn't really work—I mean, it may make you feel better at that time. It doesn't obviously help the project, so, yes, it can get inappropriate really quickly, but there were just sort of times when I felt I had to do something, and I just—because that just made me feel better. (laughs)

THOMASSON: Sure. Yeah,

CARTER: And that—I mean, language it turns out has probably been my biggest challenge partly because—so working on the plan in the 1980s, go to a public meeting in East Austin, people—for me—they look like my grandmother, they look like my mother, I feel that I can relate to the community. Well, first question is: Well, where are you from? I said, "Well, I live in Austin and I live on West 9th Street." Oh, they said, no, that's not what we asked. We said, "Where are your people from?" So then I say, "Well, I grew up there and I do have some southern roots," so I mention Memphis, Tennessee, but they clearly—oh, so you're not from around here?

THOMASSON: They want local, really local.

CARTER: They wanted local, and then vernacular. How—what I called things—how I spoke.

THOMASSON: Interesting. So I thought you were going to say you needed to speak Spanish. (laughs)

CARTER: No, no. That I probably needed too, and I didn't. That would've helped but, no, it's—and then I end up now reading how politicians communicate, how really successful CEOs or—not even CEOs—but entrepreneurs and game-changers, how they speak about their innovation. And sort of the more far out it is, the successful ones speak in simple sentences that are comprehendible by a third-grader, anywhere from third to eighth grade. And if you get above eighth grade, you—

THOMASSON: Interesting.

CARTER: —you will lose—you kind of lose people obviously anytime you throw in a technical term, an acronym, or some buzz word. And so the really successful Elon Musks of the world actually speak very, very simply. And that was never—and it's probably a personality—never my virtue.

THOMASSON: Sure. Your Mom was an English teacher. (Both laugh)

CARTER: And so that has been a downfall.

THOMASSON: I see. Interesting.

Okay, let's see where we are in our questions.

Well, I have this question that I modify for the person I'm talking to. How much has being blank influenced the path you chose or the decisions you made in your career? And at times I fill in female, Hispanic, African-American, gay. So—

CARTER: I got two out of them. (laughs)

THOMASSON: You have two options here. How would you say being an African-American, female has?

CARTER: Well, I mean, first of all, it affected me becoming an architect in the sense that I really felt I needed to be of value, I needed to be of use. And one of the things that I think discrimination in my lifetime and in my age cohort—one of

the things that discrimination took away from us, I think—and maybe it's just me personally—took away this panoply of career options. I felt I had to be professional, I had to make more money than my parents did, which probably has never happened, (laughs) but there were whole sort of things. And so to me that narrowed it down.

My brother's a musician, constant source of problems between my brother and my parents because he chose an art. So I didn't feel I could be an artist. Even then I felt, well, maybe a graphic artist and then I could work at a newspaper or something or a magazine. So I've never felt that I could do something that was purely creative, purely—you know, didn't have some underlying—

THOMASSON: Responsibility?

CARTER: Right. Being an adult. (laughs)

THOMASSON: Grownup.

CARTER: Being a—making a grown-up decision. And I think that's colored by being African-American, not so much by being female, but certainly by being an African-American.

But both of them have mainly because it is hard to disentangle what someone is reacting to. And sometimes I never know, and I'll attribute it to one thing or the other or—well, who knows?

So I think it's definitely affected the choices. It's affected the fact that probably a third of the work that we do is either volunteer or pro bono. I have always tried to offer my services to people and clients that may not even know what an architect is or what they do or why they should pay for it. Whether that's me being a mother, the nurturing—people who know me know that's not me, so—that ain't it (laughs). So all of that I think has played a part in what it is that—

THOMASSON: The directions you've taken.

CARTER: —the directions and the decisions I've made for better or for worse.

THOMASSON: Interesting.

Do you have artistic pursuits or interests that you've integrated into your architecture and your design?

CARTER: Not that I've—well, some. I mean, again, the graphic artist I think still comes back, and so one of the things is color, just things that I do that I like, they

tend to be very colorful or have colors and patterns associated with. And usually if I describe them, everybody says, Oh, yeah, I can just sort of—the cringe is palpable. (Both laugh)

THOMASSON: You're trying to verbally describe them?

CARTER: Right. It's a little purple with some green and then some—

THOMASSON: I see.

CARTER: Yeah, you (undecipherable) kind of throw all that out and everyone's just—you can just see everybody reeling back, and then I say, "And this is what it is," and they say, Not so bad.

THOMASSON: When they see it.

CARTER: When they see it, then they actually see what is being done and, oh, yes, they can tell that that is really purple but it actually is a very light purple or whatever—whatever the deal is.

So that—so my artistic tendencies are—right now I take a ton of photographs. I don't do a thing with them but I just take a ton of photographs. But part of that is—and most of them are not recognizable by—they can be a photograph of—at the Chinese museum in history in Taiwan and Taipei and they wouldn't even know what it was because I'm taking—it's either because, like, in that situation it might be because gold, yellow, green and red and orange were in this one particular place. So that helps me put some of these disparate things together.

THOMASSON: Sure.

CARTER: And I figure, oh, when I retire, I'll go through and sort of make kind of collages out of all these things, but of course, I won't get that done. (laugh)

THOMASSON: So travel. I'm not sure this is even on my questions. (Carter laughs) It sounds like travel has been a part of your life.

CARTER: Travel's been a part of my life, and I have been very fortunate that my parents traveled, but also they let me do things that a lot of parents would not. And I did. I was sixteen years old and I went to England and then I said, "Mom, I'm not coming home." (Thomasson laughs) You know, they talked to the headmaster and the headmaster said, "No. She really is pretty—pretty good having her here," and I said, "Oh, by the way, I may actually want to go away to

college." So I took my A levels because I actually at that point thought I wanted to go to college in England.

Then when I told them I wasn't going back to Yale my junior year, I was going to go to the Middle East, I mean, a lot of parents would have said—

THOMASSON: You're on your own.

CARTER: —you're on your own or worse.

Then when I got married, my husband travels, and so that has been a huge thing, and then we traveled with our kids.

It's gotten a little bit—it's kind of come to a head now—and part of it is realizing that we're getting older, and the fun of traveling is to be able to walk or to be able to hike and just to not only see the great built environment but the great natural environment, and we're not going to be able to do that forever. And so we're trying—we're doing a lot of traveling now. We're fortunate enough that people pay for my husband to travel, so I just sort of tag along. But, yeah, it's a huge part—I'm headed to Russia in two weeks.

THOMASSON: Great.

CARTER: And then after that I'll be in Dublin and after that I'll be—you know, it's—and it's been—you know, we've been to Asia but we also realize we really haven't because you can't just be there for—or even a week. It's such a different—so, yeah, all those things are in the future if our future allows it.

THOMASSON: Good.

Let's see. We're way over our hour.

CARTER: I talk a lot.

THOMASSON: It's all very interesting.

What advice would you give architecture students or young architects today?

CARTER: As much as I am not a sketcher, I think right now we still need to realize that hand-eye coordination, brain is very important, and with the—the computer allows you to do a lot of dumb stuff—

THOMASSON: Quickly.

CARTER: —very quickly. And then to undo it quickly, and so therefore you think you can do it again, and you think you can do it again and again and again and again because it's so quick to do it. So I think there is still value—and they need to learn how to print. They need to learn cursive. I mean, evidently cursive isn't being taught anymore. So I'm very old school. I mean, I think those things are very valuable because part of it is: how do you organize that page? How do you—but it's also: how do those building materials go together?

It used to be when someone came in for an interview that there were two tests. They had to hand fill out—there're probably three—had to hand fill out their application even if they'd typed and sent one in. I said, "No, you need to write it," and part of it I just wanted to see how they wrote and how their handwriting broke down over a four-page piece of paper. Then they had to—I said, "Okay. I'm a drop of water, where do I—" and give them a picture of a section "—where do I travel in this?" and some of them were of good details, some of them were bad details. I just wanted to know where they thought the water was going to go. And then the third one is—I did—I just wanted them to write some notes to note a detail. And this was way after we had started using computers, and rightly or wrongly I just felt that told me a little bit about them, and not that you had to get it all right but there always seemed to be clues as to how they thought about things, what they saw or they didn't see in any given situation. So I think that is important.

And I also think it's also important to know that no matter what you learn today, it's going to be outdated in two years. What I know—it's a little bit different for me because I'm in historic preservation, so there are things that I'm always going to have to kind of keep the way they were. But if you think about what a (Interviewee is saying, "Quote unquote,") "standard residential wall section," looked like in 19—quite honestly in 2000—and what it looks like today, it's entirely different.

THOMASSON: Sure.

CARTER: And so you always have to be learning something new.

I as an architect—there are architects that, you know, they have studios, and it's an educational studio. They only do schools. Or it's a medical—they only do hospitals and they know hospitals inside out and probably why I'll never get to work on another hospital again because now there are people that that's all they do.

For me I've always been a generalist, and for me that's been the fun, it's been the challenge. I think I've been responsible at being that generalist. But it's,

like, if I do a fire station, I get to be a fireman. I get to think like a firefighter. If I do a clinic, I get to think like a clinic. But what it allows you to do is to realize that any activity is really a process. And it allows you to analyze a process and what makes the process work or not work, what can be root causes of failure.

Quite honestly, I've been able to carry that into working with hospital—working with a hospital as a lay person in overseeing and providing governance and pathways for quality in a hospital setting.

So I think that being able to think—now, we used to think of it as problem-seeking and problem-solving—but those really are the core things—

THOMASSON: Fundamental skills, yeah.

CARTER: —and so for me, if I ask you to do something and you say, well, I don't know that, to me that's, like, the wrong—not only the wrong answer, it's the wrong attitude, I mean, because generally it's something that you can learn more about. Sure, there're going to be questions and, sure, there are going to be things that will have to be massaged and worked through, but you should be willing to—and really kind of—know how to attack that. I think that's our value. That's our value when we go into—whether we go into being a mayor or being a governor or—yeah, I think that's a value that we bring—

THOMASSON: That architects bring.

CARTER: —that architects bring to the table all the time.

THOMASSON: What do you feel are the most important factors influencing the future of architecture in Austin and the Austin area?

CARTER: Well, I think this is a challenge. It's not just for Austin. Well, I think there are challenges for Austin. There are challenges because Austin is unique. It's not a large city but it's not a small city. It is not—it has diversity. It has obviously anchors of government, anchors of education. Our tech anchor—it could go away tomorrow, but the education and the government are going to be here, so, again, to me the challenges are always who and what are we as a community, what are our values as a community, and how do we live and perpetuate and promote those values within the community? How do we educate our children? If we say we want a walkable community, to me the challenges are: how do you actually have work/life balance so that children—it's not just that they're being driven everywhere or that there's a helicopter parent hovering over them, that they literally—they can walk in a safe environment both from people, from automobiles, safety from all aspects, environmental safety—that they can walk to the things that they need, that we could somehow—what are we going to

do with all us old people? The gray tsunami, and where do we live? Who takes care of us? How do we at least be useful far past our retirement? How do you integrate that into this walkable safe community?

I think we can answer some of those but we do have to think differently. We have to think about small catchment, to use the planning term, catchment areas, but if you think about it, we already have them, elementary schools. We tend to put them in clusters. If elementary schools started to be a backbone that was also our recreation, it was everybody's library. If our healthcare in a sense sprang from that, you treat the child, you treat the family. If our old people or elders could stay in that community, they can volunteer in the school, they can volunteer in the garden, we could eat out of that garden. If that becomes our nucleus and we start to look at safety in that environment, look at—if people are working at home, what does that mean? And it's not a crime to let your kid walk ten blocks away.

THOMASSON: Or ride their bike—

CARTER: Or ride their bike.

THOMASSON: —to their friend's house. Right.

CARTER: And form-based codes are going to fail too. I think we're starting to see that failure in the sense that if I go down Lamar, it looks like Dallas.

As soon as you become totally formulaic in what you're doing, whether it's a written code, pro-scripted, pre-scripted, whatever term you want to use, then you lose that vitality. So to me part of planning is serendipity.

THOMASSON: Um hmm. Not plan. (laughs)

CARTER: Not planning. What can happen by—and it's not so much by accident—but if people are thoughtful, how can things be different?

THOMASSON: Responding to the needs of those little—

CARTER: Those little—and if we start judging things more by--- first do no harm, and if it's shown not to be harmful, then let's go ahead and let that happen.

THOMASSON: Yeah. Okay.

Do you have any favorite places in Austin?

CARTER: Oh, my favorite places in Austin. My favorite places in Austin tend to be the natural areas.

THOMASSON: Oh, okay.

CARTER: I'm still—I love to walk the Greenbelt. It's gotten obviously more crowded. I remember in 19—when we first moved here in '73, you could still actually go up to Gus Fruh and up and you could kind of sneak up in those areas. I guess it's Campbell's Hole or whatever, and I remember even in the mid-'80s walking up there with our kids. But I still enjoy that. I still enjoy that and I respect the fact that one day that can be rushing water and the next day it's—or two days later it's bone dry.

THOMASSON: Dried up. (laughs)

CARTER: So to me that's—and the fact that that can happen close to the city I think is very important. I think the boardwalk has been a great contribution. But, again, what I like is still being able to go down on the north side just from the neighborhood. The fact that you can walk down and kind of—and I think it's great that we've removed some of those industrial activity—and we need to do more and we need to make sure it's clean and safe for people.

I'm obviously not a fan of tearing everything in East Austin down. But it's happening.

So, yeah, I guess in the end, I really just like the natural environment. (laughs)

THOMASSON: Well, is there anything that we didn't talk about that you want to add?

CARTER: No, I don't think so.

I thank you for doing this, as I said, I'm—

THOMASSON: Oh, yeah, it's a pleasure. Your story is great.

CARTER: I mean, for me, it's just my story, and it's my everything.

THOMASSON: I understand that, and what I enjoy about doing this is the adding up of all those little stories that as I interview different people and how they all—it's surprising how the paths have crossed.

CARTER: Right. I mean, when you say—I asked you who you have interviewed already, and you said, “Bob Coffee and Tom Shefelman and Evan for his dad,” and those are all people that actually when I first moved here were people that were in a sense influential. They were very accepting of me and worked with them.

I guess one person I should mention because to me he is such an anomaly—let’s put it this way, when I first met him, I didn’t know whether to think of him as genuine, and that was Jim Pfluger, James Pfluger.

And I was lucky enough to work with Girard Kinney on the Pfluger Bridge, and I’m glad that it’s named the Pfluger Bridge. And this is because I did become very active in AIA when I first moved and before I had the kids, and Jim Pfluger was very much encouraging me to take on more leadership in the AIA and to work with the—and at first I was suspicious. Who’s this older Anglo guy and what’s he want? What’s going on? And the more I worked with him and the more he just was very genuine. And I was surprised, and I shouldn’t have to have been surprised, and I’m sorry in a way that I was, that I didn’t just take it at face—

THOMASSON: Trust.

CARTER: —just trust. And his death hit me very hard.

But certainly Tom Shefelman, we’ve worked together over the years, and his first—the early—before I got here, the things that he had done in terms of planning Waller Creek and the downtown, and again, all these—

THOMASSON: Congress Avenue.

CARTER: —Congress Avenue, these were all seeds that were being planted.

And then Alan, I worked with him on several projects. But that whole family was a dynamo.

THOMASSON: Well, thank you for all you’ve done for Austin. And thank you for doing the interview with me.

CARTER: It’s been my pleasure. Thank you, Toni.

END OF INTERVIEW