

**DR. LARRY PHILLIPS**

**Interview 275a**

**August 7, 2015, at The History Center, Diboll, Texas**

**Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, long-time President of Angelina College Dr. Larry Phillips reminisces about his life, his career in education, and the successes of Angelina College. He discusses his early years as a student and teacher and then spends most of the interview focused on Angelina College, which he presided over for 24 years as its second president. Dr. Phillips discusses the challenges and rewards of the community college system in Texas, his belief in community colleges as agents of change in the lives of their students and in the community as a whole, the changes in the educational processes he has witnessed, and the needs of the community college system in the future. He praises the Lufkin and Angelina County community for its support of the College and its programs and credits the community, the board, the donors, and the faculty and staff for the College's successes over the last 50 years. Dr. Phillips particularly mentions the vocational and nursing programs as successful programs and also discusses the community services programs, the partnerships with Buckner Family Place and local high schools, and the Angelina Arts Alliance.

**Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG):** Alright, well today's date is August 7, 2015. My name is Jonathan Gerland. I am with Dr. Larry Phillips today, we are at The History Center and we are going to do an oral history interview. Dr. Phillips I thought maybe just to get us started, I did a little bit of a background check on you, so I don't quite know where the best place to start is, but maybe let's just start with, I know your mother and father were both educators so just talk a little bit about how you got into education, you know, your passion for education and your career in that regard.

**Dr. Larry Phillips (hereafter LP):** Well thanks, well you are right, my mother and father were both lifelong public educators in Texas. In fact they met in '38 or '39 when they were both teaching at a four teacher, four room school house in Cedar Springs, Texas, which is on the Brazos River just outside of Marlin. My dad was a teacher and high school football coach for 42 years and my mom for 20 because she took some time off to raise three big old boys. And I guess I knew, from the time I was in high school, I thought I knew, that I wanted to teach history and be a coach. Turns out that only lasted for four years, because I did, when I graduated from Rice after a short stint at trying to play pro basketball, which is an interesting story, but was fun, I got my masters. I worked at Spring Branch High School and I was a history teacher and I was a basketball coach for four years. Then school administration called, a little more money, by then married with two young kids to feed, and so I took the job to be an assistant principal. I was in Spring Branch High School for eight years and then the most fortunate thing in my life - while working on my doctorate, I had to do an internship and there were a couple of opportunities to do that, but one of them was at a new junior college that they were founding in the Houston area called North Harris County College. It was the first year

that it opened, in 1973. So, I said sure. It was a short drive, plus I kind of knew the dean out there, and so in '73, the summer of '73, June 30<sup>th</sup> of '73, I joined as an intern really, part time, the first staff at North Harris County College and it just was a career changer. I just really, really, fell in love with what community colleges could do, the mission of community colleges, the impact we could have on people's lives and the community. It was like college plus, like a college plus so much more. Of course it was exciting to be part of something new and we grew and we developed. And I was, to make a long story short, not going into every step, but I was there for 18 years and held a number of positions. Then in '91 I had a chance to see if I wanted to be a CEO or a president and the Angelina College job came open. A great college founded back in '66, the first class was in 1968. Dr. Hudgins had been the only president. I didn't know much about Angelina, only I knew it was in East Texas, and I really liked East Texas. I was born in Livingston, by the way and my dad coached there.

**JG:** Yes, let me...sorry to interrupt, but I wanted to ask you a little bit more about your father.

**LP:** Okay, well my father was a... he was a typical coach. There is a TV show called Coach that was on and I understand it's going to get a rerun, and I can't think of his name now but the man that plays that reminds me of my dad.

**JG:** Really.

**LP:** He was a football coach's coach. He was all business, he was all about the kids, more than winning or losing, because he lost his share of games as well as won. He was a great athlete. He played two or three sports and even in World War II, when he was in the army at Ft. Bliss, they had a football team. I think he was probably almost 30 years old then, and he played. And so he just loved sports.

**JG:** Now he played baseball.

**LP:** He played baseball yes, he is here... he has made an appearance, kind of, in a way.

**JG:** He is talking about an exhibit we did.

**LP:** In the history museum, an exhibit there, because he played for the Diboll Millers when he was coaching at Livingston which was from 1946 through...well he coached before the war when I was born in 1942. He came back after World War II and coached from I think '46 to '49. Sometime during that time, and obviously I would have been six or seven years old, I don't remember too much about it, but he played for the Livingston Cardinals, which is also kind of an amateur, semi-pro, something team. I remember going to see him play wearing red and white and catching. Then he also drove up here, and I wish I would have asked him more about it. But I know he drove up here and had fond memories of playing with the Diboll Millers. I guess they did that on the weekends maybe? There is a photograph you have here at The History Center. Ironically...

**JG:** I think we speculated at times about, because I know from others that sometimes they would have almost like pick up teams.

**LP:** I think he was one of those. I think when they needed a catcher, I think he played catcher, he played other positions, they picked him up and come on up and he would drive up. I don't ever remember, of course again I was six or seven years old, coming up here to watch a game. I just remember him talking about it.

**JG:** Right, right.

**LP:** But anyway, that was my dad and my mom was equally...people tried to talk me out of majoring in education in college, because they said you are going to Rice and you're going to be a teacher and major in education. I said that is what I want to do.

**JG:** Now tell me about the decision to go to Rice. How did you do that?

**LP:** Well I graduated from high school in Houston at Houston Jones High School in 1960, and you know, I was a good student. I could have gotten some academic scholarships too, but I was a pretty good basketball player and I was tall. I was 6'6 and I still am, I think. I shrunk some! So, I had an opportunity to go to several different schools, but back then the Southwest Conference was the thing. It was a lot different than now. It was "The League" in Texas and Rice was very competitive in all sports. We still are by the way, in some sports. As an alumnus I have got to brag on us. Although we had our down times in the '70's and '80's, but in 1960, Rice was a very competitive... obviously a good school, a very competitive place if you played sports to go. And I almost went to SMU [Southern Methodist University]. Both of my brothers went to SMU later on and played basketball, but I was kind of a home boy I guess and Rice was there in town, although I lived on campus. They had a new basketball coach, which my dad really admired, Mr. Johnny Frankie, who had just come there from Wharton Junior College. They had a legendary football coach, although I didn't play football, Jess Neely, and so all those things kind of came together and that is just where I chose to go.

**JG:** Then you received your master's degree from the University of Texas and your major was history.

**LP:** Yes, I wanted to go to a school that... First of all I had no intent of getting my masters. I had accepted my first teaching job at Spring Branch High School. I had already signed my contract in April. This was an interesting story. I actually had already been out there and met the head coach and the principal and was getting my books. I was getting fired up about being a teacher right out of Rice, and then in early May of that year, I don't remember the date, I've still got it, I got a telegram. How things are different now, now everything is on ESPN.

**JG:** A telegram huh?

**LP:** ESPN, and I got a telegram that said something like, “You have been drafted by the Detroit Pistons, stop, please call this number, stop.” First I had heard of it and the National Basketball Association was very different back there, but I had indeed been drafted in the sixth round by the Detroit Pistons, which was a surprise to me. I didn’t think I was good enough to play pro. I had been a pretty good college player, but that is a story we won’t go into but I happened to have a really good game at the right time and the scouts...

**JG:** You know Buddy Lowery played for Detroit.

**LP:** He did, but I think just before me.

**JG:** Just before you, yes, that is interesting.

**LP:** And, as you will hear I never got to play, but of course I wanted to try that, of course you want to do that.

**JG:** Yes, yes.

**LP:** So, I did what I thought at the time was probably a dumb thing. I went down and resigned my job and tried to work out hard all summer and tried out with the Detroit Pistons in the fall, but lack of confidence I thought I better have a backup plan. So I said well I plan to get my masters, just not this soon. So, I shopped around and I wanted a school where I could take history, pure straight history and get the graduate hours in history, but also where I could do it in education, because I knew I was going to teach. The University of Texas at the time, The University of Texas now called the University of Texas at Austin was one of the few schools that had an MA and not an MED but a Masters of Arts, MA in History and Education. It was a blended degree and you did your thesis in both and you got access to some great, great history teachers at University of Texas. Dr. Divine, Dr. Sunder, I mean I really still remember. So anyway I thought this is my backup plan. So, again lack of confidence, I went ahead and pre-registered and then I went ahead and got on the plane and went to Detroit in late August, about this time of year in fact, for their tryout camp and surprised myself. I did pretty well. I played in three exhibition games against the St. Louis Hogs, got to guard Bob Pettit, tried to one game, and Cliff Hagan and Bill Barnes and these people I had been watching on TV. It was a thrill for me. I surprised myself and I almost made it and didn’t. And was called in one day in St. Louis after a practice and said you know we like you, we want you to go play for the Wilmington Blue Bombers, in Wilmington, Delaware and work for Dow Chemical. That was the Eastern League, you worked during the day. I mean it would have been...I might should have done it, you know. I’m not sorry I didn’t do this, but you worked for a company. The Eastern League operated this way for many years, Monday through Wednesday or Thursday, then you got on a bus and you barn stormed and you played in the Eastern. It was kind of the minor leagues, you know. And I said, “no I don’t think I want to do that” and I got on a plane and came back to Houston and drove to Austin and two weeks late, enrolled in The University of Texas in the fall of 1960. That was a great...things turn out great in life because it turns out had I not gone ahead and

gotten that masters, you know, I probably wouldn't have ever gotten a doctorate, you know, and gone on to a community college career.

**JG:** Right.

**LP:** But that is how it happened.

**JG:** Did you do a thesis?

**LP:** I did a thesis. My thesis is like most people's theses or dissertations, are not something you want to brag about or talk about but I wanted to blend the history. I wanted something useful. I wanted to blend the study of history with education, and most of my thesis had to do with education. One of my advisors was history, but I actually analyzed, now get this, the history text books from which we were teaching American History back in 1965, which is when this was, and I analyzed and compared them, particularly comparing the questions at the end of each chapter. To prove that if...and some teachers would do that, if you just used the book, you weren't teaching history because every book was deficient. It missed some important components, you weren't teaching all the critical thinking skills. You weren't teaching things that we need to teach in history. It was kind of interesting, and I did that in 1965.

**JG:** Yes, that is interesting. So, we are kind of jumping around a little bit, but describe getting to Angelina College, when you came to do the interview. What were some of your first memories, your first impressions?

**LP:** I remember well. I came on a real cold and rainy day on January 2, 1991. I had gotten called for the interview before Christmas. I knew I was in, I think the four finalist. I thought I must be the first one they interviewed because January 2<sup>nd</sup>, you know, I really still don't know. I guess I was. And drove up and I don't remember exactly how the day started, but at one point I had a chance to visit for about an hour with Dr. Hudgins, whom I knew kind of from state meetings and that was good. I was hosted by Mr. Joe Byrd, the legendary Mr. Joe Byrd, thirty years he was on the board of trustees at Angelina and I guess he was a committee of one, and he took me around and showed me a little bit of Lufkin and drove me around and had lunch with Joe and Mary Byrd, my wife and I, she came, stayed at the Villas at Crown Colony. I was impressed with that, and then that evening I met a few people on campus but it was strange I found at later there was a faculty committee, but I guess because of the time of year, it was between semesters, they didn't interview me or anything. They were just part of the paper spring. And that evening about six or six thirty we had lunch at Crown Colony and about a two, two and a half hour interview with the board. I went home thinking, well I don't know, maybe. I guess I was a little bit surprised, not shocked, but surprised when I got a call, and to this day I have been trying to remember, because we have been going through this process again the last year hiring my, you know, the person to come after me. It is terrible, I cannot remember who called me, whether it was Mr. Shands, who I guess at the time maybe was president of the board, Bubba Shands, or whether it was maybe, they had a

search consultant out of Austin, perhaps it was...but anyway I got a call mid January and I actually started at Angelina on March 11, 1991.

**JG:** I remember looking at the newspaper article at the time you were hired, and I don't know if it was a quote from you, but they were summarizing your decision to accept the position and it mentioned that you were impressed with the stability of the leadership and the direction that Dr. Hudgins had implemented.

**LP:** And that is absolutely true. I thought when I came here, I thought I'm coming to one of the top three or four junior colleges in Texas. I really am. I said I need not to do anything to mess it up, you know. But, I think I did say something like that, and looking back on it twenty five, a quarter of a century, boy that sounds like a long time, a quarter of a century later, yes, it turns out that is right. It was a good place, they had worked very hard, not just Dr. Hudgins but a lot of the founding faculty and administrators who are now many of them are gone or retired, they had worked very hard to establish credibility, to make sure their courses were of the highest quality and all that. So I said wow this is great because all we have to do now is kind of expand on that and grow it and make sure we stay up with the times. Yes, I think I probably did say that and it was true. I was impressed!

**JG:** Coming from the background of North Harris County Community College and coming to Angelina a little more of a rural area, if you will, is there any comparisons, contrast you can make between, from your perspective?

**LP:** Oh yes, it's totally different. A junior college, a community college in an urban area and this is probably a fair... I've often said it is kind of like a utility company. It is kind of taken for granted by the people that live in Dallas or Houston or San Antonio. They know it is out there, but it's where you go to pick up some courses. Now don't get me wrong, they are very fine schools, and I am glad I got to work there for 18 years. I am very proud of North Harris, but the difference is in a more rural area or in a town the size of Lufkin or smaller, and there are many junior community colleges in Texas that are in much smaller places than Lufkin, it is a source of community pride. It is the community's college, this is part of their identity, they are very proud, they know it has different status. It has a higher status I think in rural Texas, which is sad because the way community colleges are funded in Texas today, which is basically on enrollment and in enrollment growth, if you are in rural Texas, it is hard to keep up. It is hard to keep up with the 50 junior colleges in Texas today, Jonathan which enroll something over 700,000 students, of those 50 junior colleges, 8 of them, the top 8 account for over 70 percent of all the enrollment, so the other 42 of us are out there scrambling to try to keep up, because rural Texas, particularly west Texas and somewhat east Texas, is just not growing at the same rate. So, you know, yes one thing I can say over the last 25 years, is both residents and maybe even the people that work at these colleges, there two different atmospheres. In urban or suburban community college, or junior college, they are the same thing, most of them have adopted the name community now, an urban or suburban community college is probably, maybe a little bit taken for granted by not only the people that attend, but also the residents, and maybe the ones that work there. They assume there is going to be

growth and they assume it just happens. Where as in a more rural area, you have to work at it harder, I think you are more appreciated. I really do by the community and that is a big difference.

**JG:** Okay, what were some of the challenges or opportunities that you saw as a new president when you came aboard?

**LP:** Oh my, well again, there were more things that I inherited that were good. There were very few challenges or opportunities, but obviously picking up on what I just said, you wanted to grow and you wanted to reach out. I thought we had to really establish our off campus presence in some of the surrounding counties. In Texas, each community college has a taxing district and they vary in size. Ours is Angelina County, and in some cases like Paris, Texarkana it is not even the whole county it is just a school district. But then by law, and this was put into statute in 1996, before then it was kind of understood, but now it is by law, we each have our service area. And our service area encompasses twelve counties okay, or parts of twelve counties.

**JG:** How is that determined, just by people that come or do y'all define it?

**LP:** It's very interesting. This is something for an oral history. I was actually part of that process, but let me digress into that, but let me finish the statement. So, one of the things I saw, is we had to expand down into our service area. We were already there. We were already offering courses at high schools at night, but that led directly to establishment of off campus centers, which we now have in Jasper, and Livingston and Crockett. But that is tricky because you cannot, they weren't in our taxing district, so those outlining areas had to like "build it and we will come" and they did. But back to your question, because that is an interesting historical question, I was actually in the room when it happened. For years, community colleges had kind of had unofficial "this is our territory." If the high school calls, or an industry in that town calls we will go there, and you stay out, this is our territory. There were some debates about that because there are obviously some places that were kind of half way between different colleges. One of the great advantages that Angelina has, is there is no community colleges south of us until you get to North Harris County College in Kingwood, now called Lone Star. There is nobody north of us, until you get to Kilgore and Tyler. Then we go from the Louisiana line, you would have to go all the way to Blinn College in Brenham, now Bryan, so we have a huge swath. This great place we call East Texas, actually 10,000 square miles of it, bigger than the state of Massachusetts, that we really we are the show. We are the only show for community colleges. So not so much for Angelina but over the years there have been debates over whose area was whose, and finally through the leadership of the Texas Association of Community College and the tremendous help of then Senator Ben Ratliff. In 1996 he introduced Senate Bill, and I'm sorry I can't think of the name of it now, but it would codify, it would put into law where your service areas were. We were at a meeting in Austin that year, I think it was early in '96, probably January or February and on the agenda, all the college presidents were there and we said look if they are going to help us, if they are going to put this into statute, we need to decide. We need to make some decisions, so it was almost horse trading. They had a big map of the state up in front and

you were, most of it was a given. It was a given that Angelina and the counties that touched it would be a part of our service area. But some areas were, we're not sure. I will never forget that I went up there at the end, they called me up, and they said Larry, Dr. Phillips, and I went up there with ironically, the President of North Harris County College, the place I had left five years earlier, and they said what are we going to do here about San Jacinto County right in here. I mean they are kind of between y'all and nobody has anything going on there, and I couldn't believe he seemed hesitant to take it and I said we will do it, San Jacinto can be ours. Because I saw that someday hopefully we would have a center at Livingston. They were building the road across the dam of Lake Livingston, which would put Coldspring 16 miles from Livingston, so sign us up. We will take that! So, to answer your question, I was in the room that day and there was some horse trading or negotiations about who had what, generally based on distance and the historical pattern of how you would serve that community. Another good example, Jonathan would have been in Jasper and Newton County. We had a presence in Jasper and had since 1975, when we started offering courses over there. And Lamar University, and this is well before my time but this is the story I get, this is second hand, said wait a minute, Lamar University said, "wait, wait, what is Angelina College, that junior college doing in Jasper?" So, they actually went to the coordinating board, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and I'm told took out a map and found that Angelina College was five miles closer to Jasper High School than was Lamar. And so, we had a presence there but when it came time to do the service areas we looked at the map of East Texas, Jasper and Newton being long counties that run my goodness from north to south, I simply said "you know we want the northern half of those counties. We want where we are. We need to serve Jasper and Newton and Burkeville, but we don't want to go down into Buna and really close to Beaumont. We will leave that to Lamar University or to Lamar Orange, which is really a two year college." So that is the kind of horse trading that went on in that room which is probably historically significant, because unless you were in that room that day, I mean it is a very good question. How were these developed? They were developed simply by the college presidents in 1996. And there have been some changes since then. Almost every legislative session including this session, somebody complains or wants to go with somebody else, so there is a special bracketed deal that only applies to one county, where part of one county or one school district joins another one, but that is how they were developed.

**JG:** Okay, talk about enrollment growth and kind of looking at it chronologically from the time period of when you started to what it has become, and maybe some changes or shifts over the years and how have you actively been a part of that or experienced it.

**LP:** Well of course I have been a part of all of it in a way. I've been watching it even today as I retire, I'm watching our fall enrollment numbers, hoping we can grow some. Here is kind of the pattern, when I came in 1991 I think we had about 3,100 students, just over 3,000. And we grew steadily throughout the 90's which was a good decade for junior colleges in the state, economy-wise and growth-wise and state funding-wise. And then we had a boom in our growth in about '97, when we opened up the new technology center and we really added, and we really just expanded the amount of vocational technical courses that Angelina College did. And I think when we turned the century in



2000, I looked at this the other day, I think we had about 4100 and we've continued to grow. In the boom times, not boom times for the economy, but for college enrollment, which was 2009 and 2010, we got up almost to 6,000. We got up to 5,900 students.

**JG:** Almost double then.

**LP:** For community colleges your enrollment is just counter the economy. If the economy is strong, your enrollment may go down a little bit. People go to work, they don't need jobs, you know. If the economy, if there is a recession or the economy goes down, or there is layoffs, which was certainly the case in 2009 and 2010, your enrollment goes up. So it's kind of counter cyclical to the economic cycle. Anyway, we got up to that level and now we've kind of stabilized here in 2015. We are at about 5,200, hoping to get back to 5,500. So, the last 25 years have seen slow, steady growth, obviously from 3,100 to the 54 to 5,500 which is averaging about a hundred a year, but it hasn't worked like that. If we charted it, if we were visual and could see a graph, you've gone up and then whoops, you've slid back for a little bit, and then you've gone back. That has happened a couple of times. A lot of things, a lot of factors in that growth. Opening the off campus centers I think helped because we have people in the far reaches of our service area, although there only 50 miles away, Crockett, Jasper, Livingston, that might be taking courses that might not have been 20 years ago. But I guess the biggest change and this is true not only of Angelina but all community colleges, that tremendous popularity and growth of what we call dual credit, or concurring enrollment, unbelievable. I mean, going back in my personal history, in 1975 I think, when I was still at North Harris County College and had a position down there, I was told that I should go out and go to high schools, that we were going to start something new called the EA, Early Admission Program, where selected high school students might be able to take a couple of college courses their senior year. And I did that. Never did I dream that we sit here today in 2015 and almost 16% of all the students enrolled in Texas community colleges are still in high school.

**JG:** Sixteen percent.

**LP:** At Angelina it is 23%, almost a quarter of our enrollment, because what happened around, it happened slowly. I mean, when I came here we were just doing a little bit of it, maybe a 100 students a year. Somewhere around 2000, a lot changed. Number one, four year schools got more and more expensive, so parents and schools said, well let's take twelve or fifteen hours at the junior college to get a financial head start. Number two, the state encouraged it, and still encourages it and is even pushing public schools to make sure that students that can handle it have an opportunity to get at least 12 to 30 hours of credit. And then the last eight or ten years is a phenomenon called the early college high school, where the state of Texas is chartering schools around the state. We have one here in our county, Pineywoods does it, Pineywoods Charter School. And the six superintendents of Angelina County are very excited as we speak, here in the summer of 2015, they just got approved to do an early college high school for vocational careers, and they're coalescing to do that. So this phenomenal early college high school means, don't just get a few hours, try to get an associate degree while you are in high school, or a

certificate. And so for a lot of reasons it has been commonly accepted the last 15 or 20 years, that for many students, they are going to be coming out of high school with college credits. So, that has really obviously boosted our enrollment because although East Texas isn't the fastest growing place in the state, we have all these students still in high school. This fall, fall of '15 we may have as many as 1500 dual credit concurrent enrollment students. They don't all come to campus, some do. The schools bus them out there.

**JG:** I think Diboll buses.

**LP:** Diboll buses their people up there, so does Central, Hudson, most of them come on their own. They run a bus. Lufkin they ask them to just come on their own. Huntington, we go to Huntington, we send two teachers out there, three, four teachers out there to Huntington to teach History and English.

**JG:** So these are regular faculty members on campus?

**LP:** Yes, regular faculty, and some of our outlying schools, we do it via distance learning by interactive TV, or we send a teacher out. A lot of schools are now gravitating to online. They want us to do the course online and then they have a high school teacher in the room with them, kind of like a proctor, I mean the teacher is a good teacher, but probably doesn't have the college credentials yet and so they proctor the course, or not proctor, they tutor and they act as an aide. So we do it a lot of different ways, but when you talk about enrollment, not only at Angelina but at community junior colleges across the state, a lot of it has been fueled by this dual credit phenomenon. In Angelina County too, in the last unfortunate 10 years some of our enrollment growth has been from retraining people. When we have a Papermill closure, a Foundry closure, and now as we speak some layoffs from what was Lufkin Industries, now GE Lufkin, I'm proud to say we've retrained a lot of those people. There were over 100 people from the Foundry that went through...

**JG:** Are you talking about Texas Foundries or the foundry at Lufkin Industries?

**LP:** Texas Foundry, we are just now dealing with the foundry at Lufkin Industries.

**JG:** Yes.

**LP:** So that is not a good thing, for economic reasons, but in the last decade we've done a lot of retraining of people as well.

**JG:** It is interesting what you are talking about the dual credit. I graduated from Lufkin High School in '85 and I took a course, Mr. Baldwin came on Lufkin High School campus and taught us, and I received an associate's degree from AC and transferred to SFA [Stephen F. Austin], because I officially began college in '84 it put me in on the '84 catalogue.

**LP:** Was that good?

**JG:** Well I thought it was at the time. It gave me less Spanish requirements or foreign language requirements, but now I wish I had had that, because it could have benefitted me in my interest in cartography. But overall yes it was good but it's just kind of an aside joke.

**LP:** No, no, it's not an aside you were in the '80's, you were kind of on the front end of this dual credit thing and now lot's has changed. For instance now universities wouldn't do that. They generally don't count, they count the credits, but they don't count the courses you took in high school toward your GPA.

**JG:** Okay.

**LP:** They don't really count you as a transfer student. I mean obviously you are because you've got a transcript with credits you took in high school, but generally now a lot has changed and will continue to change, as Texas and indeed the nation, sorts through this phenomenon of, these are my words, of blurring the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> grade, of who does what and who did this.

**JG:** See my son is an incoming senior now, but all last year as a junior he was taking college course credits.

**LP:** From us?

**JG:** Through AC [Angelina College], but I think it was his normal high school teacher. I mean their Lufkin High School faculty was teaching the courses.

**LP:** Well sometimes they are. If the high school faculty has their master's degree and 18 graduate hours and some experience we interview them. We treat them just like our own adjunct part time faculty. If the high school faculty member meets the qualifications that colleges have to have, we pay them and we use them. We make them an adjunct faculty member and we are proud to do that. We would use them at night to teach a night course too, so that a lot of people don't understand that. They say well how can this be a college course it is taught by his high school teacher, well what people don't realize is probably a high percentage, maybe 50% of the people we call adjunct or part time faculty, are indeed high school teachers who are moonlighting for us or teaching something at night. In this case they just happen to be teaching on their own campus. It is strange I'm sitting here talking to you about dual credit, and it has become so commonplace that not only did you do it, but now your son is doing it, and people come to expect it's part of the junior and senior year in high school. And in many cases it is.

**JG:** Talk about, you were talking about how the college has served the community in retraining people who have lost their jobs, for lack of better way of putting it, but talk about how the community college has changed specifically to nursing. I know that has become a big...

**LP:** Well when I got here, I clearly got the band-aid from the board and the hospitals and they were saying more nurses, more nurses, more nurses and we've heard that for 25 years, because I don't think there is really a nursing shortage now, but nurses turn over a lot. They go in and out of the workforce. They are a fairly mobile group of people, and so we have continued to work on having one of the best nursing programs in the state, and I think we do. I mean we are up now where we accept 80 to 90 nurses every year in the A.D.N program and hopefully graduate close to that many the next year. We have a real strong transition program where if you are an LVN, you can come and take a short summer course and you can get to be an A.D.N in one year. We've been taking 50 of those every summer. We have one of the states few career ladder programs, where you can...it is kind of hard to explain, but you can start to be an RN, and then if you take a course in the summer after your first year of the two year RN program, you are an LVN so you are a working LVN during the second year of your RN program. We are excited, we are about to announce... this is supposed to be an oral history, I'm not supposed to see into the future.

**JG:** Talking about the future. (laughter)

**LP:** But we are about to announce an articulation agreement with Texas A&M, where our students can go right onto the bachelors and masters online with them, so we've done a lot with the career ladder in nursing. Last, not last year, year before last, out of the hundred, I think 107 or 108, four year and two year B.S.N and A.D.N. nursing programs in the state of Texas, our graduates, we had the seventh highest pass rate, including universities, everybody. So, I think Angelina has always had a very, very, strong reputation for our nursing program.

**JG:** What percentage of the enrollment would that be? You mentioned, I think twenty three percent was high school students of enrollment.

**LP:** Actually for all the attention nursing gets, it is a small percentage of our enrollment, but we have so many people in pre-nursing. In any one year of our 5,000 plus students we probably have 600, whatever percent that is 12 or 14 percent, that profess to be in their major pre-nursing. Now many of those are just taking pre-requisites, some of them will not get in or decide not to go into nursing, many of them will channel off into other health professions such as radiology, respiratory therapy, we even have pharmacy techs, sonography. We have eight different programs. They might become a paramedic, but the whole health careers gets a lot of attention at Angelina College, for a lot of reasons because of course Lufkin is the medical and health hub of East Texas with our hospitals and our medical facilities here. It is a high percentage of our faculty, because you have to have a one to ten ratio in nursing. Fifteen of our 120 something full time faculty, over ten percent, are nursing faculty, so a very good program, a noted program, but not as big a part of...in fact one of my favorite questions when I have a Chamber of Commerce group or something on campus, is what area of the college trains the most people for medical professions, health careers? Of course they say nursing; well actually it is not, its non credit continuing education, what we call community services, because there they do the short nurse aide course. We train over 300 nurse aids a year. They have medical office

procedures, phlebotomy, a lot of things that is not in our nursing department. It is not even for college credit. It is over in the non credit so we do a lot of that too. In fact, probably one of the biggest changes in Angelina College over the last 25 years, has been the full development of the non credit community services courses. Dr. Fred Kanke, who just retired this last June deserves a lot of credit for that. I mean starting in the 90's, we've added the regional police academy, we have a fire academy, we have all those medical courses I just talked about in nurse aide and so forth. In 1992 or '93 we assumed the small business development center, which started at the Chamber of Commerce and was given over to us. That is a very successful program, that aids that assist small businesses, of the Technical Procurement Center which we acquired also in the 90's through Charlie Wilson who was as you know instrumental in anything that had to do with defense. The Technical Procurement Center is kind of unusual. It is a Department of Defense program and it helps small businesses acquire government contracts. It helps them write specifications and do bidding, and we have one of those on our campus. I think we might be the only community college in Texas that has that. And then Adult Education, the overlooked part of what we do, I think. For years there was something called the Adult Education Co-op here in Lufkin. It was four counties. It was run kind of as a cooperative of school districts working with the TEA. Very ably run for years by the late Bob Quillen, and was located downtown at the Lufkin Adult Learning Center, right downtown. And very quickly I wanted in on that, because I think adult education, which is training to get your GED, to speak English, to become a citizen, I think that is one of the most important things community colleges do. So, in 2000, when the opportunity arose and the co-op kind of was being reorganized, we took that over and moved it out to the college and I'm proud to say last year, when Adult Education was moved from the Texas Education Agency to the State Workforce Board, and became more competitive, we got a grant and now we are able to do all 12 of our counties. So, we have a huge adult ed program now that serves our service area, all 12 of our counties. We have I think 1300 people in it this year and our goal next year is to get closer to 2000. It is the hidden, the underside part of the community. These are people wanting basic literacy, learn to speak English, get your GED, and that is all in that other side of the college which we call non credit community services, so a lot of things have happened there at Angelina College.

**JG:** Was that a program or an initiative when you first came, or did you start that or did you grow it?

**LP:** Well I'm not going to take personal credit, but yes I was instrumental in thinking we should be a part of that and Dr. Kanke helped, and even today around the state not all of the community colleges do adult education. Sometimes because it just falls where it falls, and sometimes they don't apply. It is a grant process, and sometimes adult education done by the school district or some other. In Tyler it is done by the Tyler Literacy Council, which is kind of like an adult literacy group. But I think it is really an important part of the community college mission, and yes, I was very interested in expanding that. You can tell I'm still excited about that, you know, some of my best stories from these last 42 years in community colleges have to do not just with the college part of the college, but the non credit part which includes adult ed.

**JG:** Yes, talk about, you know, you talked about enrollment growth, talk about in the context of the budget and then I'll have a follow up question about the campus itself there in Lufkin and the growth, growth in land and growth in buildings things like that. But how do you balance, in talking specifically about those things, but where is the balance and the process of doing those and making those decisions?

**LP:** That is a really good question because you deal with that every year. Community colleges, it's often said, are funded, it is one of our strengths, by a three legged stool. We have three sources of revenue. One like any college, is obviously student tuition fees, two, we get some funding from the state, and sadly when I came here in '91, 67 percent of our budget came from the state of Texas, today it is 33 percent. Or put simply, in the last quarter of a century state funding for community colleges has not kept up with the growth. Not just here, everywhere. And then the other third of that three legged stool, one being tuition and one being the state funding, is local taxes, local property taxes, the source of revenue that universities don't have. Of course public schools do, but it is very small. Most public schools, as you know, Diboll, Lufkin, Hudson, their tax rates are about, well it used to be \$1.50 now about \$1.17 per \$100 assessed value. Our tax rate is 17 cents and some of that is for bonds. We do bonds, just like public schools that the voters vote on to pay off buildings. We can talk about that later, about the building program. But then the other, that is about a nickel of that tax rate, the other twelve cents is to operate. So, the reason your question is such a good one, it's a delicate balance every year to see how you juggle those three legs of the stool. You don't want to get one, you will fall over, you don't want to get one too long too short. I mean we have low tuition, okay and we want to keep it low. I think we are in the bottom quarter of the state among community colleges. People don't realize how cheap it is. I mean a student at Angelina County can go out there and take a full load for just under \$1,000 a semester, you know, about one fourth or one fifth of what it is at a university. An out of county student that doesn't pay property taxes can do it for about \$1600 a semester now, and I feel good about that, but I look back to 1991 when I came, and it was a third of that. I mean you could take a full load, of course inflation is part of it, but you could take a full load for two to three hundred dollars. So you don't want to increase tuition too much. You want to keep the taxes about the same and we have. I think the operating tax, which is the part you operate the school, on not the part the voters vote to build buildings, and this is from memory but I'm pretty close, I think was about 7 cents in the early '90's and now it is 12 cents. That is a nickel, that is five cents, but it has taken 25 years to do that. The leg of the stool that hasn't kept pace is the state funding, because the amount of dollars we get per student has gone up and down, up and down a little bit, overall particularly in the last ten years it has gone down. So, the budget is a balancing act and our budget this year, that is going to I think get approved by the board of trustees with the new president at the helm next month, is about 20, almost 21 million dollars, which sounds like a lot. You are going to ask me what it was when I came. I don't remember, but it was in the low teens, but the budget is a challenge. It really is! And of course, we get money from donors, but generally that is for scholarships. We have a six million dollar endowed scholarship fund. We are proud that we are able to give two or three hundred scholarships a year; very generous people in Lufkin, Texas, but generally those donors are for scholarships. Sometimes we do get monies from foundations, we have been very fortunate with the T.

L. L. Temple Foundation, and the Kurth Foundation primarily, and others too, to get grants from them for buildings or parts of buildings and equipment sometimes, and that has helped.

**JG:** Talk a little bit about the fine arts center and the Temple Theater and all that.

**LP:** Oh the Fine Arts Center is one of my favorite stories. I guess this story does go away with me, nobody has written this down. In 1994, we passed the first bond since I have been here and the first bond that Angelina College had passed in a long time, a ten and a half million dollars. It narrowly passed, and the voters voted that we could spend ten and a half million dollars, which they would pay back over 25 years through this little bitty tax and it was to do several things. It was to build a new technical vocational building, okay, which we did in '97 and it is still great. It is out there on the corner of Daniel McCall and College Drive. The Continuing Education Community Service Facility, which was built at the same time, it is kind of across from it, some other minor improvements at the campus, Student Center and some other things, but there was 2 million dollars of that bond that was set aside to renovate the Fine Arts Building, which is now named Hudgins Hall. We were going to add a fly loft, because we didn't have one and some storage and some backstage dressing rooms, is what we were going to do. And between the '94 passage of the bond and about 1997, certain people in town deserve credit for this, not the least of which would be the Chamber of Commerce. Jerry Huffman and other people said, "you know, Larry have you ever thought of making it bigger, so we can have community events there, so we can have like the old concert series brought back." I said well "a junior college doesn't need a big facility. A good crowd for us for our plays and things are maybe 300 to 400 people." "No, but come on, we can help." So, the Chamber formed the Angelina Arts Alliance, well before there was ever a building. It was just a dream of having something like this, and I think they started meeting about '95, '96 with this goal, that this could happen. And then there is more of the story than I can even remember, but of course we went to the T. L. L. Temple Foundation, and we said we've got 2 million dollars and that is all we've got. We hired a consultant, a theater consultant, that came in here from Ft. Worth, did a community survey, did focus groups. We traveled, I traveled a lot and we looked at other facilities in Marshall and Dallas and Stephenville and Temple, around the state, in Plano, to get some ideas, in Irving. And finally decided okay, to do this it needs to be at least 900 to 1000 seats to have a critical mass of people to have these, bring in these outside performers and of course I insisted it needed to be very functional for college use on a day to day basis so that we could teach classes in there, and have backstage stagecraft classes and that kind of thing. The theater department, Mrs. Pat Baldwin, was instrumental in that, working with us helping design what they thought we needed – a black box theater. And I remember, "saying what is a black box and why do we need that?" No colleges have to have the black box, which we have, a costume shop. So we began to design it with the help of a theater consultant and Mark Strong and Ray Scott of Scott and Strong, our architects. This whole process took two to three years, and it was obvious we weren't going to have enough money. And so the T. L. L. Temple Foundation indirectly, and I've got to give Ellen Temple a lot of credit here, put us in touch with the Houston Endowment, the Brown Foundation, the Meadows Foundation out of Dallas, that we had

done some business with before, but some of these outside area foundations had never given to a junior college before. And I really do want to give her a lot of credit. With her help behind the scenes, and others, she had contacts and we did our part, we were able to assemble not only an initial 2 point something million dollar grant from the Temple Foundation, we were able to assemble almost as much from these outside foundations and the Kurth Foundation. I've got to mention the E. L. Kurth, Jr. Foundation gave us, these are from memory now, but I think it was a million and a half over three years. So, we got a good amount of money assembled and it was well that we did, because it turned out that the facility and its furnishings cost nine and a half million dollars, which I've been told is still a bargain when you see it today. And we were very pleased with all that help to open that facility in 2001. This is a story worth oral history. I will never forget the opening we wanted, the Arts Alliance had Marvin Hamlisch, he was the first name performer to come in and perform in the Arts Alliance series. Now the Arts Alliance, by the way is a subsidiary of the Chamber of Commerce. I made this decision, and I hope it is the right one, history will see, the college could have run the series like some universities do. We could have run our own college fine arts and we could have had an outside series, university series collegiate, but I wasn't sure I wanted to do that because my job was to promote and raise money for the college and I knew it would take considerable donations and season subscribers and all the things that the arts take. And whereas I thought the college should probably host it, and this was a wonderful home for it and we wanted to work with them, but that should probably be somewhere else, and thanks to the Chamber it is. We are the host of the Arts of Alliance some people have trouble distinguishing the two. We provide box office services, a home, we don't charge them any rent. We help them in every way possible, but they are a separate organization, a partner. But anyway the partner organization, The Arts Alliance, wanted to do Marvin Hamlisch, but we selfishly wanted the first thing to be done in that to be a college production, you know.

**JG:** Yes, yes, one of your own.

**LP:** So that is what we did. Hamlisch came the end of September 2001, but the first college production was Mrs. Pat Baldwin's, "A Secret Garden". She was a master at children's theater, and she always did one children's program every year, and she said, "I really want to do this. I want to have community in it. I want it to be a big production and I want it to be a big set" okay. So, we opened with the Secret Garden on September 10<sup>th</sup> and please note the date. (**JG:** 2001) September 11, 2001 and on the tenth, which I think was a Sunday, we filled it up, we have never filled up, because people wanted to come see the new place and it was a great production. If you know anything about the play, "A Secret Garden," it is a children's secret garden, a fantasy land, and then on that next day we were doing it for the schools. And, our dream, my dream came true, of seeing the yellow school buses pull up and just unload hundreds of children and have them on our campus to see this play. It was a dream come true! So I walked out there and when I walked out there to it I noticed a lot of bus drivers were huddled around in their buses listening to their radio, and there was a buzz and people were stirring around and I thought oh my gosh something has happened. Well, of course what happened was 9/11. So, everybody knows where they were on 9/11. It is kind of like knowing where you



were the day Kennedy was shot, the day the world changed. But, I will never forget we were opening this marvelous theater, which was a community-backed endeavor, full of over 1,000 little kids, and I remember saying that day, their world has just changed. I wish they could stay in that theater and stay in their secret garden all day, but that is what we were doing on 9/11 and that is when we opened it.

**JG:** Wow!

**LP:** The Temple Theater, obviously named not just for the T. L. L. Temple Foundation, but the Temple Family and I think fittingly so, was largely a combination work of about 2 million dollars that we had in that bond election, coupled with a huge grant from the T. L. L. Temple Foundation and their assistance in getting these other grant participants to play. It was a good effort.

**JG:** I think it is a great thing, the focus on the school children, because like I said I have a 17 year old son and he has been a part of some of those productions, where the acts that come in mainly to perform for an adult audience I guess, also will do the shows for the kids. So that is great!

**LP:** We had that...I give Joe Byrd credit again. He was very big on the arts, music and particularly orchestral music, at that time of the 90's was spear heading the Orchestra of the Pines, which was an SFA Regional Orchestra that played here twice a year, had a Lufkin branch, kind of. Joe's dream, Mr. Byrd's dream was that, that the theater that we built would be a magnet to bring kids that might not be exposed to live theater and those kinds of performances and it is happening, it is really happening.

**JG:** Yes, that is great. Talk a little bit about, well, I will think of a better question in a minute I guess, but you had a top ten list (**LP:** Oh my goodness) at your reception the other day, and I actually recorded you on my phone, but it didn't come across too well. Do you remember some of that, you shared?

**LP:** Yes, I remember the top ten lists. I don't remember when I started this. I guess I watch too much David Letterman on late night TV. Letterman and I retire the same year and I'm not always a fan of his, but top ten list. That started several years ago, and I will answer your question directly in a minute. When I spoke at the Chamber, they ran out of speakers I guess, so they settled for me and I had to speak at a Chamber First Friday and I wanted to do something different, so I presented the top ten reasons you should not go to Angelina, not, that you should not attend Angelina College. That is not your question, but I'm touching on it and, you know, I thought they were funny.

**JG:** What were some of them?

**LP:** Well like one of them was you won't learn to do...it was a power point, so it's not going to make sense verbally. One of them was you won't learn to do things with your hands, like this, and had a person giving the hook 'em horns sign and one giving the thumbs up sign. Has it ever occurred to you that every university in Texas must have to

do something with their hands? I think that is unique to our state and I said you won't be able to do things like this, instead you will be able to do things like this, and I showed a welder, a draftsman, a nurse, people actually in vocational training doing things. And I think that was kind of neat.

**JG:** Yes.

**LP:** Another one is, I showed a guy pulling stuff out of the washing machine that was all pink and I said you will never learn to do your own wash, because you won't leave home, you'll commute, you will save ten thousand dollars a year, but you will be a commuter student. And that is kind of funny and not funny, because we do lose a lot of students because they want to get out of town, you know, stuff like that. My favorite one is you won't be able to have a bumper sticker on your car saying my son or daughter and my money go to Baylor or go to wherever. You would have to put a bumper sticker on there saying I'm saving ten grand a year he is at AC. So it was kind of poking fun at community colleges and anyway, I did that and I thought it was okay, but since then I have had several people, Chamber people, say, "Dr. Phillips could you give your top ten list again I liked your top ten." And I know I'm not a very good speaker, so over the years to try to structure it I've made a couple of remarks to faculty like when I announced my retirement last October, I told them the top ten reasons I knew it was time to retire. I pulled out my cell phone which is a little bitty flip phone that I was behind the times technologically. They thought that was funny. Then again the last time I spoke to the faculty, our last faculty meeting in April or March, it was something else goofy. It was the top ten things that are not on my bucket list. I know I don't want to do this. So anyway, when I retired and now to get to your question I said, I'll just keep the same theme. The top ten things I was grateful for, and this is serious now, for my 24 years at Angelina College and my 42 wonderful years I've been able to spend in community colleges. You really want to hear them?

**JG:** Yes go ahead.

**LP:** Oh come on, you said you taped them. Let's see if I can remember them. The tenth one and these are in no order, just as I thought of them is the opportunity to serve 50 years in Texas public education. Because I just think education... and I still feel the same way I felt when I decided when I was a sophomore in high school this is what I was going to do. I think teaching and education has been a wonderful career. It is fulfilling, you meet great people along the way, you feel like you're doing something worthwhile. I think that was one, education. My next one, number nine, if you are going to be in education, I'm so fortunate to be in a community college. And I talked about, and I'm still passionate about community colleges and our mission, and what we are able to do, and how we are more than just a college, we help the community. I talked about all of that. And then the eighth one is if you are going to be in a community college, you better hope it's in a community like Lufkin and Angelina County. This is as sincere as I could ever be. This place is like a laboratory of where you would want to start a community college. It is an absolute model. You have great community support, you have donors, both foundations and individuals, you have people that believe in what you do, you have

nearby access to a good university at SFA, so you are students have a place to transfer, you have industry that supports you, although industry is changing now, just all kinds of reasons it's a good community. That was number eight. And I think number seven was good community was one thing but you better have a good board of trustees. Then I tried to say and I'm sure I left some names out, the board of trustees at Angelina College is just remarkable. From the founders and I'm not sure I can remember all their names as I sit here so I'll leave people out, but Bubba Shands who was on the steering committee, but who stepped back and I understand there was a story behind that, and didn't want to be on the first board, but later served for many years on the board of trustees, but was so instrumental on the steering committee. I still have some of the speeches he gave that's going to be part of our archives, to encourage the citizens back in 1966, to found this community college. So, from Bubba Shands, two original board members are still with us and one of them was at my retirement reception, Dr. Spivey, the incredible Dr. Spivey, who still the whole time I have been here would come by and see me once or twice a year to encourage me. Judge Walker, David Walker, the others on that first board, Ann Allen was on it, Oscar Brookshire was the president. I have their photograph; I just turned it over to our archives the other day. I believe Bob Poland, Robert Poland, not the one that's on the board now, but his father. So, we just had down through the years tremendous boards, George Henderson who was on the board when I came here. And then the seven board members I work with now I called their names individually. I just can't say enough and the community doesn't realize if you don't have a stable board, if you don't have a board that is community minded, that doesn't happen throughout the state, a lot of times boards of trustees get off track. They have special interests, they squabble, ours has never done that.

**JG:** How are they appointed?

**LP:** They are elected. They are elected for six year terms, which is a long time. We elect two every year in even numbered years.

**JG:** So it is self election?

**LP:** No, no the community votes, just like a school board.

**JG:** Oh okay.

**LP:** Just like a school board. Now, if one of them resigns in the middle of a term, they appoint, they can appoint their successor, but the person they appoint has to run at the next election. So, it is much like a school board. There are seven places, places one through seven. We haven't had many hotly contested elections, because they haven't been controversial people. I mean people see them, and say who could do better than that. So in fact it's been awhile since we had an election. They changed the law in Texas Jonathan about ten or twelve years ago, and this was a good thing, if no one else filed, you didn't have to have an election. The first part of my career, they may have only been one person file for that seat and it could be the incumbent. You still had to have an election and spend six or seven thousand dollars conducting an election, which we

conduct these elections with the public schools, in conjunction, same polling places, but you still had to have an election. Now the law has changed, where if by a certain date no one has filed and there is only one candidate, the board gets to cancel the election and in a sense have that person by acclamation.

**JG:** Save the money, yes.

**LP:** So, they are elected. The genius of a community college is it is a lot like a university but a big difference it is locally controlled and the board of trustees, some community colleges even call them boards of regents in some states, are locally elected and not appointed, or at least in Texas not appointed by the governor. So anyway, the seventh reason I think was the board. The sixth reason was the people I'm grateful for. These were the top ten things I'm grateful for, the top ten things that made it so special. The sixth one was the people I've come in contact with in education, superintendents, chamber people, economic development people, city leaders, particularly here in Lufkin, just wonderful, wonderful people. The fifth one was specifically the people of Angelina College, and there I wanted to be able to single out people like Patricia McKenzie, who has been there for all but one of our years, 46 or our 47 years, the last 27 as Dean of Instruction, Vice President. And, Dr. Kanke I think I mentioned him and others that contributed so much and the retirees and I wish I hadn't gone there because I called out the names of one or two of the retirees, like Jim Lovelady who was sitting in the crowd, who helped build that first Technical Vocational Center and 'cause I know I left some out. There were many others in the room, but I started naming retirees, but the people of Angelina College, and of course that is what I will miss the most is working with those folks. That was number five and then I think four, three, two and one I got to my family, because somewhere you have to introduce your family. Number four I think I thanked my parents, long since deceased, for steering me to education in the first place.

**LP:** Did your siblings go into education as well?

**LP:** That is an interesting story. There were three of we boys, and my middle brother did not. He was an attorney in Dallas and he had a heart attack and died suddenly at age 44. And he did not, but my younger brother, who was there at the retirement who is just a year younger than my middle brother, six years younger than me, didn't. He played professional basketball for two years and then got out and went into banking, investment banking, mortgage broker, and then at age 35 when the economy all of a sudden wasn't too good one day, he decided he was going to make the switch and he went back and got his masters and went into education and he has been an athletic director now for 30 years, currently athletic director at Alamo Heights in San Antonio. So one of my siblings did, but one didn't. All three of my daughters, which I recognized them next, are either teachers or directly connected to education in some way. One is a counselor. Let's see then, my grandkids, I recognized my grandkids, blessing number two and introduced them. Of course every retiree feels the same way, looking forward to spending time with your grandchildren, but maybe not babysitting them for more than a day or two at a time. (laughter) No they are great. And then number one I recognized my wife, Teresa, and she teared up, that was good. But she has been my partner through all this, and kind of let me

do my thing, and not complain when you are gone a lot at night sometimes, or when you are not making as much money as you could. And, I'm not complaining about that now. As president that is not true, but everybody knows teachers and educators and those in helping professions in general, and those working for the public, do not always make the same salaries as people in business and industry. But I recognized three so that was mine, thank you for asking. That is the replaying of the tapes of the top ten things I'm thankful for, but notice how many of those have to do with Angelina County. I mean the board, the people that work here, the community. It just...it is just a great place and I think Dr. Simon, who is taking my place he has been here a whole week now, already realizes that. Hey this is not just another place, this is a special place.

**JG:** Did you have any input in the hiring and interviewing process or do they get some comments from you beforehand?

**LP:** No I didn't and you shouldn't, really. Indirectly I did, I guess, kind of. The board, I gave them three search consultants' names, they interviewed and they picked one and they picked a good one Dr. Anthony. He's done seventeen of these in Texas, so he knows the state and he has experienced. So indirectly I kind of recommended search consultants and the board picked one. They formed a 14 person screening committee, and they wanted seven from the community and the board picked those seven. I had nothing to do with that. They were good people and then they picked seven people from campus. I did nominate those seven people from campus. I didn't nominate them, I took nominations from the faculty and staff and kind of looked through the top ones and made sure there was diversity, in a lot of ways, department, division, age, so I gave them those seven names, which they approved. So I had indirect there and from there I kind of tried to stay out of it. The screening committee picked the finalists. The screening committee the board interviewed. The only thing I did, is I told the board because the board told me, they said you know, if you know anything about these people good or bad, we consider you a reference too. We want to hear from you, but they didn't need my reference because they had 12 to 14 references on every finalist. As it turned out, I didn't know many of these people. Of the finalists, I kind of casually knew one who had been a president in Texas. I had been in meetings with them. But two were from out of state, and two I didn't know at all. So, to answer the question no I really didn't.

**JG:** Dr. Hudgins was at the helm for 24 years, and you were at the helm for about 24 years.

**LP:** Now that is coincidence. People have asked me about that and said, "Why don't you stay on another year and beat Dr. Hudgins or something?" I kind of thought about that when I was retiring and thought I don't want to get into that. This is a good year for a lot of reasons for me, age being one of them, and it is my fiftieth year, that is a good round number but, I guess we've got to give Dr. Hudgins credit. Dr. Jack Hudgins was hired in December of 1966 so he was here a year and a half before the college ever opened its doors. He had to be, to get it off the ground.

**JG:** To get it going yes.

**LP:** He did a good job, so technically Jack Hudgins was president from, let's see if I can do this arithmetic, from December of '66 until I came in March of '91. What would that be? That would be 24, pretty close. Then since I came in March of 1991 and then technically ended my tenure as president last Friday, that would be 24, I mean I have never really done this, and I'm not going to do it now but it's actually ironically, we were both president about 24 years and 4 or 5 months. The difference was that the first year and a half of his presidency was spent in that all important... there was no college, he was getting it ready. It is just a coincidence about the same amount of time.

**JG:** Would you have ever thought back in 1991 that you were going to be here for the rest of your career?

**LP:** No, oh no, in fact, I guess I know this will be public but that is alright to tell this story. When we came in '91, my youngest daughter was in the sixth grade. The other two were out of high school. I told my wife, I said I think we are going to like Lufkin and this is a good place, but we can stay here six or seven years, which by the way is about the average tenure of a president, until she graduates, and then we will move onto something bigger and better. Since then I have seen, found, heard about and maybe even had opportunities had I pursued them, there are many bigger things, but I really mean this I don't know that there is a better place. Sometimes bigger is not better and I don't know that there is a better place I would rather be at work at a junior community college than right here in Lufkin, Texas. So, to answer your questions no, I never dreamed that, nor was it planned, but every year got better. Every year we were in the middle of some exciting new project, some of which we talked about, growth, development, building. Every year I was enjoying it, for the most part, so no.

**JG:** You've alluded to some of the answers that I think will come to this question I'm fixing to ask, but you talked about the excitement, the challenges, the passion, just the process of being a community college president, and your passion for education. Just to let you know where I'm coming from, describe your work ethic, your approach to what you do and the work that you've done.

**LP:** I don't always like those questions because I always, this seems like a dumb answer. I am just myself. I mean don't have a... I'm one of the workers. I just go, I think wherever you are in the organization, you just go to work every day and do your job and give it all you can, and I think that is true for... and I'm no better or no different than anybody that works there. And obviously I believe it is a team effort. I'm pretty bad with titles and organizational charts. I mean I know we have to have them, but you know, you're in the trenches together. There is all kinds of sports analogies I try not to use, but you are a team. There is just some things I believe in, I'm pretty frugal, I'm cheap! I believe in not having a lot of administrators. I believe managers and administrators, you can have too many. I probably have overworked the ones that work for me, because we all wear a lot of hats. I believe you have to put the faculty and the teachers on a pedestal, because that is what it's all about. That is why you are there, their direct contact with the students. It worries me some today that maybe they don't have as much direct contact in the age of

internet. Good faculty will argue with me and say, “Oh you are wrong we interact with that student more in the chat room and online in our online classes than we ever did when he sat on the back row and kept silent.” And that may be true, I’m not an online teacher, but I think the genius of education is that personal interaction of personalities between the student and the teacher over subject matter that hopefully they are both excited about at some point. So, I just believe in teaching as the core of the process and tried to serve the teachers and give them what they need to do their job and not spending too much monies on things that might not make a difference. It is that simple.

**JG:** Okay, well in context of the question too is just recognizing your age, and that you still obviously have plenty of energy.

**LP:** Well, I do! I think I do! I thought about not retiring because I said, “I’m still excited about this!” I have had people, you get a lot of advice when you get my age, don’t retire too soon, do retire, what are you doing, you know. Every retiree has advice, I’m going to try not to have any, has advice for others.

**JG:** You are in the position now where you can give it, not take it.

**LP:** Yes, I can but I’m going to try not to do that. But I don’t know, everybody’s situation is different. I do have a lot of energy. I’m just as engaged today. I mean there are some things that have to happen in this state in the next two or three years about community college education. I told our representatives, I said, “I may be more dangerous as a private citizen because I may still, not in my role as presidency, you don’t have to listen to me, but I may still march on Austin and tell you my thoughts.” But there is a time, I’m going to be 73 years old in two months and speaking of that top ten list I spoke about a moment ago, about family and stuff, there is some people I want to spend a lot more time with and some things I want to do and a whole lot of travel I want to do. After today I want to come back down here and spend a whole half a day at a time at The History Center and look at your maps.

**JG:** Alright well come on. Yes, we will be glad to do that.

**LP:** You know it’s funny, this is a side note. When we moved up here I thought, I’ve always loved East Texas. I was born here, but I only spent the first six years of my life here.

**JG:** You were born in Livingston?

**LP:** Yes, I was born in Livingston and my wife’s parents and her family have always been from upper East Texas, Longview area they lived a lot. My father in law lived on Toledo Bend, and a lot of her family lives in North West Louisiana and Shreveport area, so we would come through East Texas often. My father, it’s an interesting story, you asked me about my father earlier, my football coach father. I often have images of the grapes of wrath of the great depression supposedly they were all starving being farmers, dirt farmers growing tomatoes in Arp and Troup, Texas. Arp and Troup of Smith County,

and they all packed up one at a time. There was like six brothers and one of them being his father, my grandfather and broke down many times, this is the image of the grapes of wrath trip, and broke down as they went down old highway 59 to Houston to all gets jobs in the refineries in Pasadena. So even on my father's side, going back to the Smith County reunions, which I used to have to go to every year up in Arp, Texas, we have always come through East Texas, always. And, it's beautiful, you know, I used to come up here... my middle daughter went to SFA [Stephen F. Austin] before I came to Angelina, so I always thought this would be a great place to live. So, I was so excited when I moved up here in 1991. And here I was going to be 17 miles from the lake, a few miles from the national forest; I haven't done any of those things. So one of my bucket list goals I'm going to go to the Aldridge Sawmill trail, (JG: okay) even if it's only for a mile I'm going to paddle down the Neches sometime.

**JG:** There you go.

**LP:** So, we really do, you get busy working and you forget where you live. We live in a great, again my successor Dr. Simon, who by the way grew up in central and northern Michigan says, "This is home, this is Michigan, its lakes and woods and water." And it does look a lot like Michigan.

**JG:** A little different climate.

**LP:** I said yes except it is about 50 degrees warmer. But anyway, it's time to retire because I can enjoy some of those things now. But I hope I never lose my excitement, my enthusiasm for education and for community. I have got to mention this because it really profoundly...I got up this morning and there is a great article today. What is today? August 7, 2015 in the latest *Lufkin News* by Gary Stallard, you probably haven't had a chance to read it yet.

**JG:** Well I saw it I flipped through it but I didn't read his column.

**LP:** I do that too because he writes one every Friday, and of course he works for us now. He is our marketing public information guy and teaches English. He is a good writer.

**JG:** Something about miracles.

**LP:** Yes and the title, sometimes I just glance at his article and the headline and say I'll read it tonight. But, I had a little time this morning, since I'm in this new role.

**JG:** You don't know what to do with yourself do you?

**LP:** Yes I do! I had a little time over coffee, so I said well I'm going to read it. And I read it and I just started...in fact I went straight in. I'm still going to the office this week for a little bit, and I asked them to make me 10 copies of it, but the title is about a miracle. But during the last ten years, and I didn't realize he had been there with us for ten years, things that have happened and how he sees people's lives transformed by



Angelina College, by a community college and without calling many names because he didn't have permission, but one or two he called names, and I know who these people are. And I will always be passionate about what he talks about in that article, which is the miracle of education and how education and hooking up with the right mentor, the right teacher, the right person at the right time, can change lives. It is a good article, one that I will hold onto. That is what it is all about. You feel like you're...I mean all of education does that, but sometimes in a university I think maybe you are just shaped by your university. You are who you are, you probably find your major, you maybe find your life's mate or lifelong friends. I'm not downing the university experience or any part of education, but so often community colleges, we actually do transform a person's life. We actually take them from here to here. It's an up by your boot straps kind of thing and that is what his article is about. That is the miracle part. Now somebody will have to go into your newspaper archives and read that August 7<sup>th</sup> article.

**JG:** Yes, there you go. That is probably a good place to end, a more profound place, but I do have one more question to ask you that kind of just presented itself. In this context of you talking about a community college's role and place in a community and then specifically the role of education and development of a person and of a citizen and then also in light of the technology changes, you know, you are talking about doing a lot of things online, where do you see, there has been a lot of talk I guess about universities and where a university is going to be a few years down the road. So, you may have some views on that, but then also what will be the role as we go forward of the community college? Will it change, will it stay the same?

**LP:** Well no I think it will change. I think the community college that I know and loved and grew up with these last 42 years will change. In fact there is a new publication out now by a think tank type group called "The Changing Role of the Community College In The 21<sup>st</sup> Century," and we've talked about most of these in our interview today. It will be more online. It will be more blended with high school. It will be hard to tell where the line between high school and junior college stops. When you think about it, it always has been, because some of the courses you take your freshman and sophomore year you just had them in high school it was just a different level. I think it will be more flexible. I think it already is becoming where semesters in some cases are almost going away and you are starting a course every 8 weeks. I think there will be, and this is not always good, there is more emphasis by the federal government on states on accountability you know, so you are enrolling all these people, let's see the results, let's see them graduate. What are you doing with them? I think it will be a greater challenge because America, we have a lot of people on the low end. We have a lot of immigrants and we have a lot of new Americans. We have a lot of people learning to speak English. I think there will always be the challenge of bringing people up by their economic boot straps.

**JG:** What about the brick and mortar, you know you hear a lot of talk about that, the brick and mortar is going to go away but I mean Angelina College, we just talked about, has done nothing but grow?

**LP:** I don't think it will ever go away, but I think even that will change. It is funny you asked that. We came back, I was with the new president yesterday and we both agree on this. We came back from a session in a meeting in Kilgore, NetNet, and NetNet stands for the North East Texas Network. It is a very unique thing, where the nine community colleges in East Texas or the universities get our internet service, we get instructional TV, and a lot of things through a consortium, which is housed at the U. T. Science Center north of Tyler. SFA is in on it, A&M Commerce and A&M Texarkana and then nine community colleges. So, we were at that meeting, and we were talking about changes coming down the road in terms of connectivity and network and wide area networks, and a new consortium we are forming to share cost on software and stuff, and we are driving back and I said you know you used to think colleges had to have to have a fund balance to upgrade or maybe sometimes build a facilities, build a new parking lot, do this and that. Now, you have got to think of your fund balance for technology. It is probably to acquire new software and to convert what you have. So, I think bricks and mortar will always be there, because that is just who we are but I think it is true that the next 50 years there will be much more money spent and emphasis put on things we can't see. The connectivity to hook up the software. That has to be happening, you know. It is amazing, in the late '90's, as late as '98 or '99, I think it was '98 or '99, we offered our first internet course, first online course. Today, fifteen, sixteen years later, let me get this right, one out of every four of our students takes at least one of their courses online, one out of every four of our students takes at least...and we are not, compared to some colleges we are not a leader in that, we are just in it. So, really that is just going to sea change. I'm not a futurist. I can't look down the road and see what's going to happen, but that is one of the things that is going to happen. It really will be. The new presidents and the new leaders are going to have to be much more technological savvy than I am, really they are. It is not just community college, it is happening in high schools, it is happening in universities as well. I have spent a lot of time thinking about that, because I like bricks and mortar and we have a real beautiful campus. I'm really proud of it.

**JG:** Yes I was going to ask you about that too.

**LP:** We have to keep up with the hidden campus, which is the technology part.

**JG:** Right, right. Well you have already made a lot of good career summaries if you will but I always kind of end a lot of the interviews with at least giving the person who was interviewed the opportunity to answer their own question. If I have failed to ask you anything or anything you wanted to add in wrapping up.

**LP:** No, thank you for letting me talk and ramble on. Some of the things we didn't cover that is really important I guess, we talked about it with the Arts Alliance, is the partnerships, the partnerships that we have. We talked about the Arts Alliance and Temple Theater, but the Buckner Family Place, unbelievable. That story is, have we got time?

**JG:** Oh sure we have got time.

**LP:** The Stubblefield Learning Center, we talked about the small business developments and Stubblefield Learning Center, which is down the road from the college, which we work with closely. We host all their graduations and we so much admire what that consortium of our school districts have done. They have graduated over 1200 people in the last...when did they start...the last however many, 19 years, that probably wouldn't have otherwise finished high school. Mrs. Darmstadter and I, the director Sally Darmstadter, last time she did a survey I think it was about sixty percent of those, almost sixty percent, go to Angelina College because they are already non-traditional students. They were non-traditional when they were in high school. So that's a good partnership/ But the Family Buckner Place is interesting. It started in, one of my favorites, in the mid nineties Mary Jo Gordon, who became the mayor's wife, because Jack Gordon was later elected mayor, but at the time she was working for us as our special populations coordinator, came into my office one day with Linda Smelley, who was at that time the one and only employee of Buckner Children and Family Services, which is a Baptist based, as most people know, organization that does a lot of things, but a lot of orphanages and she was housed in a little office across from the First Baptist Church. Well they came to my office one day, this is a true story, I still remember it, and said, "Dr. Phillips do you know how many single parents we have going to school here trying to get an education?" I said, "yes I do know that, four or five, six hundred, a tremendous amount because community colleges are a magnet obviously for moms and dads that are in their thirties or forties, and trying to change direction with their career or make something. And they said, "What do you think their two biggest obstacles are?" I said, "well ask me a hard question that is easy. Of course their two biggest obstacles are child care and transportation, transportation and child care, child care and transportation." And they of course knew I knew, that I think. And they said, "Well what if we could solve both of those?" And those two ladies took the ball, took the bit in their mouth, and I didn't need much convincing, and put together a puzzle for again the T. L. L. Temple Foundation. And Mr. Temple was really fond of this one, because there was a partnership with the Women's Shelter, for a unique concept that people who were single parents that were struggling in life could come, live in this place, receive funding, receive housing, receive child care, receive maybe some financial support somehow, and get a two year degree and be employable and change their lives. And, so we rented them, gave them really, technically it is a lease, six acres of land down on the north end of our campus, but it's on campus, it's walking and with the Temple Foundation's help they built these residential housing, twenty little apartment units and an office and since has expanded to 40. And now for almost 20 years that is exactly what they do. They take in, it doesn't have to be a woman, but it usually has been. There has been two men go through the program, but they take in women that have from one to four or five or however many children that many times have been sometimes abused, sometimes just abandoned, sometimes they are just having trouble making it and have nowhere to go. They go to the college, we provide a counselor, they provide a counselor, there is a child care center, which by the way our other students can use if they need child care. Which by the way we use as a child care lab for our child development program and it is...I can't say enough. It has been a wonderful program because again, it has transformed not only the lives of that mother, but of her children. In fact the last time they did a survey, which was a couple of years ago, of the women that had children that came through that program, whose children

were now 17 years of age or older, all of them, not all but one, not all but two, all of their kids finished high school and or were in college. I remember John Sharp, who was then Lieutenant Governor or Comptroller. What was John Sharp at the time?

**JG:** I think...

**LP:** ...was invited to the dedication, I think we have that on tape somewhere. I will try to find it. He made a great speech where he said, "This is a great partnership. It's a great service." He said, "this is the Spindletop as we start the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, this is the Spindletop of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Meaning that Texas riches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not be in oil and minerals, it will be in people, and how successful we are in developing the population.

**JG:** It's an interesting analogy.

**LP:** I still remember it obviously. And so, that is a great... and since then, it has been very successful, it has grown now where it has a whole range of services. They have a foster family program down there and nine other community colleges across the state have tried to replicate it and they have to some degree, but not as successfully as here and the reason goes back to the community. I mean our community has embraced it. The churches sponsor an apartment and they restock the linens when a lady moves out. They give at Christmas, it is just been embraced. In fact it has been embraced, sometimes I get upset because people don't know it is part of the college but it is. It is a partnership. We help get them a pell grant and the Buckner people get them what is called a TBRA housing grant assistance and we give some of them work study jobs on campus, so that is one we didn't get to talk about that as you can tell, it is just amazing what can happen. Two women walking in your office one day and say we think we can make this happen. There is a lot of other stories like that, but that is a significant one.

**JG:** Well okay, I'm glad you added that. And anything else?

**LP:** No, thank you for letting me do this. It is obviously very, I guess does something to your ego to get to sit down and talk about...

**JG:** Well it is hard to but so many years into an hour and a half.

**LP:** But I try not to talk about me, because it is not about me. It is about this wonderful, I meant what I said at my retirement reception about the wonderful opportunities I've had just working with public education and being at the right place, which is Angelina College in Lufkin, at the right time, which has been these last 20 years or 24 years. Thanks!

**JG:** Thank you!

**END OF INTERVIEW**