

Interview with William Dibrell

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Location: Mr. Dibrell's Home, Wimberley, TX

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Amy M. Leethy: So, do you want to start with a little bit about your family background and how you got established in San Marcos?

William Dibrell: Okay. I was born in Bastrop, Texas, which is just a few miles from San Antonio, about forty miles from San Marcos. I was born in the Methodist Parsonage, and I moved around because my father was a Methodist preacher and an army chaplain. My family originally came from Seguin, Texas, which is close to San Marcos. I'm the fourth generation that will be buried in the Seguin Cemetery, of Texans. I'm a fourth generation Texan, and my grandson that's going to be born here in December will be a—or daughter—will be a sixth generation. I graduated from San Marcos High School. I came there after the war, in '45. My mother bought a home there in San Marcos. My father was still in the Philippines. He later was seriously wounded there. I finished the last part of the high school there and entered Southwest Texas in the summer of 1946, and I graduated in the spring of 1949. I went through in three years. Then I taught school for a year in Luling, which is just twenty miles from San Marcos. I taught speech and drama, and I coached junior high school football, junior high school basketball, and I coached the high school baseball because I played a year and a half of professional baseball when I was in Memphis, Tennessee.

Then the Korean War came, and I was recalled, and I went in 1950 to Korea. I was in the service there until 1952. I saw combat there for nine and a half months. I was wounded there.

I came back and got my master's degree at Southwest Texas in special education, dealing with hard-of-hearing children and dealing with children who have cerebral palsy and this sort of thing. Then, the next year I went to Lockhart, and I was Assistant County School Superintendent. There wasn't anything to do. It was just a governmental do-nothing job, so I created a job of becoming a visiting teacher for that county. There were a lot of little children that weren't in school. There were a lot of Hispanics that were out picking cotton in that area, and they didn't get through until late in October. They weren't in school. There were a lot of poor blacks and Hispanics and Anglos in the county. I took in Luling, Lockhart, Martindale, and there was a black community up in St. Johns, and Prairie Lea, Fentress, and Prairie Lea. I went each day to each one of these schools and found out why these children weren't in school, and then I went out after them. I had

the paper work done to file on about five farmers who would not let the Hispanics—the *little* ones; they were talking about kids six, seven, eight years old out there picking cotton instead of at school. I came near filing some lawsuits just to get them in school. During the course of that one year, in which I learned a whole lot about dealing with the poverty people, and how important education was, during that year—it was quite valuable to me. I found little black children, there were five of them in one family that didn't have any clothes, in Luling, and that's the reason they weren't in school. So, rather than going to the government agencies, they weren't that active then anyhow, I went to the preachers. They had a meeting once a month of all the preachers, and I said, "Look, you Christians, practice you're preaching and help these people." They got out that day, and they found clothes for them and got some food for them, and those kids were back in school. During that year, I got thirteen new teachers for Caldwell County, and that's on an ADA. So, we're talking about—this is going every day to school—and you have to have twenty-six [new kids] to have a teacher [hire a new teacher]. So, you can imagine, I got about four or five hundred new kids back into school that were there but weren't going to school. It was a gratifying year. I didn't want to be a professional truant officer or a social worker for the rest of my life, but it was real good training for me. During that time, I ran for the legislature for the first time. I got a lot of valuable information about people, studying them, and so on. I ran a good race. I really wasn't as interested in winning as I was to get the experience, so I could be a better speech teacher.

The next year I started teaching in San Marcos. I taught for eleven years as a public speaking and debate coach, and then for two years after that I was a high school counselor. While I was counseling at San Marcos High School, Bill Brown asked me to assist him in recruiting students for Upward Bound. Then I was hired as the audiologist at Southwest Texas in 1967, and I started working at Southwest Texas as a teacher, and I worked part-time with Upward Bound. I went out and recruited. This was a program of finding kids that had the ability to go to college but were in the poverty zone. We went to San Antonio and Austin, and all the neighboring towns: Seguin and New Braunfels, Lockhart and so on. We had 150 of those kids. They would come every Saturday to Southwest Texas, and we recruited a faculty of Southwest Texas teachers who taught special courses to get these kids motivated into thinking toward going to college. Then in the summertime, they came on campus for a whole six weeks. They did this for two summers, and then when they graduated from high school their third summer, we paid their entry for their first six weeks in college at Southwest Texas. I worked up, I was counselor for them at first, and I recruited the ones to come in. Then I worked up as assistant director, and I still was an audiologist, and then I started teaching speech, and then they made me director the last year of the program there at Southwest Texas. It was a good, viable program. Out of this, I see kids now coming back, many of them went into the teaching profession, but I know some that are dentists and lawyers and so on, that probably—we can't say they wouldn't have gone on to college, but their motivation wasn't there. Their encouragement from home wasn't there. So, it was a real strong program as it was first set up to be.

Leethy: How many years did that last?

Dibrell: About four years, four or five years. Then of course, I went from there to—I've always been interested in education outside the "ivory towers,"—and I was interested in vocational education. They have such a bad attitude about themselves. They felt like they were the second class. So, I volunteered and worked as a consultant to the Texas Education Agency of Vocational Teachers to give them a little pride. I used to teach a motivated speech class to their coordinators that would go out in the community and recruit students, who then worked out of DE [Distributive Education] and ICT [Industrial Cooperative Training] and this sort of thing. I taught this speech class, it was more of a motivated class, to get some pride up in themselves. Out of this, they moved the unit, it's called VITE, it's Vocational Industrial Teacher Education, that had a unit at University of Texas, and they [UT] had buried it, they weren't doing anything about it, so we moved it to Southwest Texas. Along with my other jobs, I was director of it, and we established vocational education, that is, teaching teachers, there through me, though I have never driven a nail or taught vocational, but I was a supporter of theirs.

Then for many years, until last summer, I was Director of Correspondence and Extension. Half the time, I always supervised student teachers in speech and drama. I've done that for years. So, I traveled to the Austin, San Antonio, and New Braunfels area. I have been in contact with those communities daily for the last twenty years. Here, I am retired now.

Leethy: But you like it? You enjoy retirement?

Dibrell: Yes, I'm enjoying it. I'm going to look forward to teaching these two classes—public speaking courses that are coming up this spring. I'll teach two in the spring and two in the fall, they say until I'm seventy. I'm fifty-seven now, I don't know whether I'll do that that long. You know, I may not be here that long. But that would be an outlet for me to—and I'll go back to doing what I first started out to do, and that's teaching speech. But the thing that I feel like that I'm really proud of is that during my career I have dealt with every type of student. In debate, I dealt with the *highly* intelligent, the "gifted child," as they call it. I worked with the handicapped children, little kids who stuttered, who had cerebral palsy, who couldn't hear. I dealt with the poverty-stricken people, getting them in school and so on. I've taught in college. I've taught at all levels, and I've been in and out of the schools, and so, I feel like that I've pretty well touched all the bases that a teacher—and I pride myself on being a *teacher*. I'm not a professor, I'm not an instructor, and when I sign anything that says, "What's your occupation?" I always am very proud of being a teacher, and I wish more teachers were proud of being teachers instead of trying to hide it by some other title. Being a teacher is a great thing.

Leethy: So, what are your views on education? Do you think that they stress it strongly enough in the government of Texas?

Dibrell: I think that education will never be successful until the role of the teacher is more accepted in the community as a professional person. I don't think that just paying them more by itself is enough. I like the English system, where a teacher has the same position in the community as the doctor or the lawyer. They certainly deserve that position. There are some intangibles about recognition and respect that I still don't think the teachers have, and I don't think they're going to get it by joining the union. I don't think they're going to get it solely by paying them more money, but I think that more money and the move that they've made this last year, this House Bill 72 revision, of upgrading the quality of the teachers—As long as the teaching profession has to compete to get teachers away from industry that pays more—and they're getting many of the better minds that they shouldn't be [getting] —it's more of a status and recognition symbol that the teachers need. The teachers are partly responsible for this, and I don't think that they're going to get to be tops until they clean up their own act inside of education. They're afraid to fire a person who's not any good. In industry, if you don't do a good job, they give you a pink slip. They [educators] don't do this. The professionalism—they shuffle around, and they'll find another job for them, and so on, and as long as this philosophy—that they don't clean up their own act, even though the people are willing to help them—but I think the legislature is certainly going to have to help them financially, so they can compete. Today the job—how much you make is very important. I think that ought to be done too.

There are other things about education—in looking back, I would like to change some things in higher education. I noticed that the Carnegie Institute that just came out this last week in the newspaper, their criticisms of higher education are the same as mine. The undergraduate is being taught too many courses by TAs [Teacher's Assistant] instead of the full professors who are really outstanding. I think that they're sitting back and holding seminars and small-room classes and doing a lot of research and writing. For that reason, so many freshmen are disillusioned when they're in a large class and they only have a TA teaching them. By the way, a TA is a person that hasn't any educational background. To teach in college, you don't need any kind of educational training. Now, to teach in public schools, you've got to have a teacher's education program, but to teach in college you don't. A young person that's working on their master's degree, some of these are real fine, but there's so many of them that aren't. The kid who's a freshman needs the *best* showed to him at the beginning. If they're going to have TAs teaching, it's better along the line. But, the large, big classes—the professors have been backing away from them. The professors who do teach the freshmen, those departments do better than those where they don't. I say that they ought to—this thing about publish or perish, I think that the more recognition ought to be given, and merit pay, and promotions to teachers that are outstanding good teachers, in the classroom, and not just say, “Look at your vita or resume and how many articles you've written, or done research on the heartbeat of a hummingbird,” and this sort of thing which had nothing to do with society, and say, “What have you done to motivate students to learn?” and put this as really one of the major—I feel like this is very important. Now, at graduate level, we do get the good teachers, and the graduate people don't have the drop out, but we wouldn't have half the drop out if we had some real outstanding—and by the way,

these colleges have the outstanding people, but they're just sort of like the cream; they go to the top and they teach a few small graduate courses, and putter around and do research and so on and go home, and they ought to be down there in the trenches working with those freshmen. I firmly believe that, and I won't change my mind because I know I'm right.

Leethy: But do you think that that's really a problem at Southwest?

Dibrell: It's everywhere. It's not just Southwest; it's at all the colleges. I'm not just criticizing Southwest, but it's in all of them. It's at the University of Texas, it's at A&M, it's at all the schools. The freshmen need as much motivation as they can, and I would bring my best, big guns to motivate these kids, *keep* them in school. They're talking about all these new programs—general studies and all this, and a lot of remedial work. That's a waste of time. In terms of—if they really want to get kids highly motivated and study and all, they've got to bring in some motivated people. They've got them. It's not the fact that the teachers can't do it, but they're not the ones that have been teaching the freshmen. It's like anything you start with. If your chances of becoming an Eagle Scout are great, but if you have a person who is just doing this and doesn't know anything about it, and fumbles around, that kid will drop out. It goes on to anything, Girl Scouts, anything. If you have a highly motivated leader, which is a teacher, you have a successful student. Now, you're going to have some that can't cut it, but I really believe that we have a lot of kids that leave after the first year because they aren't motivated. I really think that some teachers will get them to study, get them to like it, but I don't think the TAs have that experience. I'm not running down TAs, I just don't think they ought to be up there at the front with the freshmen. They're saving money. Now Southwest Texas is not as bad as the University of Texas. They've got a lot of professors over there that actually never really teach a class, that are being paid huge salaries just to do research and just to publish, and to whom they [UT] can point with pride and say, "We've got Dr. So-and-so, who is an eminent authority on whatnot." And he doesn't do anything, and that money could have been broken down into two good associate or assistant professors who are highly motivated teachers that could be teaching freshmen. But then they run out a TA that they pay about \$3000 or \$4000 a year, and they're teaching two or three hundred kids, and some of those kids are discouraged and go home, or go somewhere else. That's what's wrong.

Leethy: Yeah, I know a lot of people that have transferred from UT to here and say that it's just a lot more personalized here in the classroom.

Dibrell: That's the reason why the junior colleges are more successful because they've got smaller classes and there's more attention put on them, on going to school. You get lost in the shuffle real quickly. A kid who's left home for the first time, they need the best to motivate them, and they aren't getting it. In the departments where they do have it, they've having success. I'm not saying all of them; I'm just saying that there's too much of it.

Ok, let's talk about San Marcos. When I first came to San Marcos, San Marcos did not have a public school building, at all, for the Anglos, which were the major people there. There was a little bitty shack called South Side School, it was about a two-room school, elementary school, for the Hispanics. There was Dunbar School, which was two or three rooms, and that was for all twelve grades of the blacks. A few blacks were here in San Marcos. There were no other school buildings. They were all at Southwest Texas. The school now, I don't know whether it's the psychology department, it used to be the old educational building. It's right across the street, where the street was there, from where the Social Science Department Building is going to be now, that they're rebuilding it now. The old building there, the high school was the first two floors, and the third floor was the junior high school. Evans, old Evans Auditorium and area there, which is now the new Liberal Arts Building, it was the elementary school. All the children in San Marcos went to school there. It was called a laboratory school. San Marcos was an educational center; they had Coronal Institute, which was a Methodist school on the little hill there where Lamar Elementary School is now. They had the San Marcos Baptist Academy. But, San Marcos never paid any school taxes until 1949, *ever*. They are paying for it ever since. They have the highest tax rate in Texas, and the reason for it is the fact that San Marcos is famous for not paying any taxes and letting other governmental agencies carry the bill. They let the college take care of them. The community still doesn't have a civic center. They've got a barn out there on the highway that they have rodeos in and whatever, but it's really not a civic center. They don't have really a place to meet. What do they do? If they have a social function, they rent out something in the LBJ building, before that it was the old Student Union building. If they had a dance or some kind of junior/senior prom, they did that, they went out to Camp Gary, which was an old army base, and they used the old officers' club. They didn't have anything. They were always dependent on other governmental agencies to provide. San Marcos has been a sort of attitude; they went with a moss-back philosophy. My grandfather, old Joe Dibrell, wrote a letter to a person in Seguin when he was in Austin as state senator, and they raised cane about the fact that, Why haven't you given the college—this Normal that you're going to create in 1903, or 1901, whenever it was—in Seguin? Do you know what his answer was? My preacher brother has the letter right now. It said, "The reason I'm putting it in San Marcos is that when you put a college in a town, you find a little dead, non-progressive, dry community, because a college will kill the progress of the town." This was the philosophy back at the turn of the century. He [Joe Dibrell] said, "I don't want to do that to my own hometown of Seguin. I want it to progress and become industrially self-sufficient." He said, "I'm putting it in the most backward, moss-back community that I know, and that's San Marcos."

Leethy: He thought that it would kill the progress of the town?

Dibrell: Well, he just said the town's already dead. He said let's put it there. It's a nice, quiet little town. It doesn't have any desire to be any bigger or any hopes. He said that's where a college ought to be. By the way, up through Dr. Flowers's administration, this philosophy held true. Firestone, after World War II, when Camp Gary was for sale—remember now, this is a big

air base. They have runways there that can land the biggest aircraft that the U.S. Air Force can produce—beautiful facilities out there, it was for sale and Firestone came down and wanted to bring four thousand people, these were research people, these weren't just making tires, but these were technical people. Dr. Flowers personally killed that deal because he did not want it to be an industrial, big, bumbling town. He wanted it a quiet community for a college, teachers college. That's true. I know it happened.

So, you had the group that ran San Marcos that really didn't pay any taxes much, it was non-progressive, run by a few of the older, wealthier people. Everybody was happy in their non-progress, and Seguin and New Braunfels, at the same time, were growing. They were doing it themselves. *Lockhart* (spoken as if no one would believe it) was growing, but it was doing it without any government aid, you know? I remember several times that they were threatening to close Camp Gary; today they've made a job corps out of it, they were going to close the base, oh, it was back when Lyndon Johnson was congressman for this district, and then when he was Vice President. The people of San Marcos, the merchants just wrang their hands and cried, What are we going to do if we don't have Camp Gary? You say the biggest industry in San Marcos is Southwest Texas. It always has been, but the people never did know it. The reason they didn't know it is that the college students back in the forties—I can only talk about what I lived—they were *poor*. They didn't have all the cars and the apartments and all this sort of thing. We were coming out of a depression and a war. So, they didn't spend a lot of gold down there on the square in San Marcos. So, they didn't count. But they didn't realize that it [Southwest Texas] was the backbone. It was only when James McCrocklin became President of Southwest Texas that Southwest Texas started to become actually a school that was interested in the community and grew, not only in size but in buildings. Also, in relationship, the town was divided. Either you were from the college or you were from the town. In the church, churches were saying, "That's the college's group, and this is the town's group." That's been going on for years, long before I ever came here. I remember old Dr. Evans, who was president before Flowers, he retired, he ran the Methodist Church, and then Dr. Flowers came in there, and he started running it. Then the people that were not in the college, they resented it, and there was a great friction between them. The main reason, I can tell you what it was, is that they weren't getting a lot of gold from those students. They were all living up there on campus, you know, they weren't out in the town and buying. Of course, always that college has been the main industry of San Marcos.

Okay, let me tell you another thing that happened. It was in the late fifties. You see right around San Marcos, the Yaqui Indians lived for hundreds of years. A beautiful spot, you know right there at Spring Lake and out there where Aquarena is and all. This was a perfect place for Indians who didn't like to fight, who didn't like to do anything except just live off the land. A beautiful place. They lived right there in that area. A lot of the descendants, the Hispanics who live in this area, are descendants of those Yaqui Indians. And they don't leave. They don't leave. They don't go out. They didn't go around conquering other places and going to Arizona and so

on. They were home-type of people. This is the makeup of these Mexican-Americans or Hispanics, whatever you want to call them. They grew in size because they all stayed there. They're poor, uneducated. In the late fifties, a coalition of a few of the Latin leaders that was set up by a group of Anglos, several of them were members of your social science department, and a real estate man and his brother who was a builder, and so on, they saw the opportunity to build themselves a political machine in a town where they had the big vote of the Hispanics, most of them couldn't even speak English, in a way that they [the Hispanics] would vote as a block because you'll promise them something. Now what do they [the Anglos] get out of it? Well, they get control of the city. They get control of the city council and the mayor. They could zone where they want to and so on. The reason I know this to be true and first-hand is—one of these professors, who was a friend of mine, and is still a friend of mine, he came to me, and he said, "Bill, you join this group," because he knew I was interested in politics. He said, "We're going to take over San Marcos. We've got the block vote, and we've got enough money," and he said, "We'll just take it over." And they did, and we became the new era, from a do-nothing moss-back community to one that became a block-vote community. There was a line drawn—you had a small group of liberals, Anglos, and the Mexican vote, which carried tremendous vote, a lot of these people couldn't read or write. They'd vote with a string, with knots in it. They'd just scratch out where the knots were. You saw the moss-back community—by the way, there's some fine people in all these groups. I'm not bitter or angry with them. I'm just telling you what happened. After my heart attack, I don't have any enemies. When you get close to dying and you have by-pass surgery, you don't go making enemies. You try to work it out yourself so you have a chance to at least make it to the hereafter. So, when I'm talking about these people, I'm just analyzing, really, from a pretty objective standpoint. Then you have this struggle between the two groups, it's still going on. There was a newspaper man, that was—well, I better not say.

The sad part about this, Amy, if this group had really wanted to help the Hispanic, and upgrade him and make him an individual American citizen, one with a job and pride, I would have joined that group. But they wanted the power of running San Marcos and using these people. The promise they [San Marcos politicians] give them [Hispanics] are social services. They give you a little crumb now and then. [They said] We'll see that you get welfare. We'll see that you get child care. We'll see you that you get free this and free that, free meals, whatever. But they never did say, We'll go out and find some industries, good clean ones, not with smoke and all that sort of stuff, that we'll get you jobs, where you can make a good wage, where you can have a television set, cars, good food for your family and your kids can go to school, and you don't have to migrate to work, and so on.

They never did do this. In fact, they *fought* it. I can't remember the year exactly, but it was when Motorola came down and they were selecting [a location] for their plant, which is now in Seguin, Texas. The criterion was that it had to be a smaller community with access to a college that didn't have any political unrest. They were meeting at the state bank one morning, it was in the fall. This group [San Marcos political machine] actually called a demonstration, it was in the

sixties, I'm sure it was, and the high school kids left school, the Hispanics, and a group from town marched by and protested something about, I don't know, length of hair or something, I don't what, but they did it right in front of the state bank. The commotion was there, and immediately it squelched a deal of over four thousand workers. These people who would have benefitted the most would have been the Hispanics who would have had *jobs*, not welfare, not workman's compensation, or what do you call it when you're not working, the money they give you?

Leethy: Unemployment compensation?

Dibrell: Unemployment compensation, yes. They wouldn't have had to rely on that. They could have had them a good, clean, honest job, and by the way, these jobs that Motorola is paying—right now, it's in Seguin. They went to Seguin when only TLC [Texas Lutheran College] was their school, and that's certainly not a school that would invite their workers to go to school because it's so high in tuition. But, that's what happened. It's happened all the way along. They do not want this group, this block vote, to get self-sufficient because then they become real citizens, and they don't want some labor boss or some political boss coming in and saying, "Here's your string. This is the way we want you to vote." When you've got food in your stomach, you've got a car, your family's healthy, and you've got a little home, you're independent, you're an American then, and then they'll resent someone telling them how to vote. That's the key to it. They won't give them that independence. They keep them just happy enough with their little social centers and this sort of things. It's not as bad now because they've got most of these things. But that's what's happened in San Marcos since I lived here. This is a nutshell. I could go on by the hour, give specifics, and I could give names, but I don't think that's important; we're talking about trends. That's what happened.

Okay, what did I do about it? You say, what was your role in it? I taught the kids, I know them, I knew all of them. They came to me and asked me to be on the city council. They said, We'll get you the money. I said, "I don't have any money to waste on a campaign. I would like to serve because I really think that I can go in there and do some good." And by the way, I told these people, I said, "You people that are putting up money, I want it clear that you *never* come to me and ask me for a favor on how to vote." And they said, Fine. And by the way, in the three years I was on the city council, not one of those five or six people ever called me or said anything about my votes in city council, so I was successful there.

Serving on the city council was the most frustrating experience I've ever had in my life. First of all, all six of the others were opposed to me and signed the vote for the other man when I got elected. I was concerned because the elderly people did not have a discount on their taxes, which are so high in San Marcos. They [the city council] had fiddled around with it for two years. Well, the first night I was there, I slipped one in on them, I said, "At the end of the meeting I'd like to say a few things." I put it [proposal to give the elderly a tax break] on the floor with a motion. They couldn't vote against it because they knew people wouldn't like it, but they didn't want to

give it to them. They had to vote, and I won. That was one of the few votes that I really just sneaked in on them.

Other than that, the trouble with the City Council of San Marcos is that they elect people from vested interest groups. I mean, more than any place I've ever seen, and these people are only interested in their own little group when they vote. They couldn't care less about the overallness of San Marcos.

All these government grants come in back in the seventies, *big*, billions of dollars. They told them at the time that these were block grants, developmental grants and all, and they're not going to be forever. I happened to be there at the time, and I reminded them: they're not going to be here forever. These are maybe one shot, maybe two, maybe six years, we don't know. I said, "Fix all our roads up, get them solid, out in Westover get them water and sewage," which they still don't have. I said, "Get projects that help everybody." Noooo, they didn't do that. They started creating a bunch of new social services. We have free legal advice (sarcastically). They hired a little lawyer that couldn't find a job anywhere else and paid him a nice salary. You see, all these government agencies, you have to have directors and assistant directors and secretaries and IBM typewriters and an office. Then what's left of the money goes to the people. After six months, I had the little lawyer come into the council. I wanted to know how he was doing. You know what he was spending all that money on? Getting divorces for people. That's a luxury. I suggested all the lawyers in San Marcos, each one take a half a day every two or three weeks and go down to the city hall, and anyone wanting free legal advice as to something like this, to give their time. I talked to these lawyers, and they said they'd do it. But we had to take this money that we could have actually got the town solvent in terms of sewage plants and this sort of thing, and they started "Meal on Wheels." They gave \$15,000, and the next thing I knew they gave them a director. They had to have an office. They had to have a secretary. They had to have an IBM typewriter. Of that money, only one-third of it went to buying meals—for the elderly. This is my point.

On the other hand, San Marcos wants to be a historical center—turns my stomach. You've got to watch it in San Marcos, if you stand too long in one place down in the old part of San Marcos, someone's going to put a plaque on you! Bless her heart, the little old lady; I'm not going to mention any names.

Leethy: I know who you're speaking of.

Dibrell: She's one of my best friends, but that little cock-house down there, by the way, I'm kin to that old man, back as ancestors. That little house where on Fridays they serve a meal and all the society ladies go in and put on old clothes, and they have a little meal, you know by the gazebo. That was an old house, and they restored it. It's cost way over \$100,000 in governmental, San Marcos funds, and I voted against it because we *still* don't have water or we don't have sewage up in Westover. There are people up there paying taxes in Westover, and

they're paying insurance as if they lived in the country because they don't have any fire protection or a well to pump water up there. The only thing they get is a policeman driving through there and the fire department may go out there. They don't have any water out there, so they just have to—they pump it. So those people, really, have been de-enfranchised, as well as—at the expense of this cock-house. And this is San Marcos. They've got them a "Hysterical Street," Historical Street; I call it "Hysterical Street,"—Belvin. I voted against that because those people now, their children, in years to come, can't change those old houses. They say, "Oh, they're so beautiful." Well, that's fine if private industry, private individuals, want to do this sort of thing to preserve. I think this is great, and there's plenty of wealth in San Marcos.

Leethy: You mean that's a city ordinance, that that street can't be changed?

Dibrell: Oh, yes, oh, yes. You can't put an air conditioner in an outside window because that's against this historical street. Now, let me say this: these things basically aren't wrong but it's wrong to pay for luxuries when you don't have necessities. That's been San Marcos's problem. Because of this interest group that's on this council. By the way, I voted against this.

One thing that might be of interest to you is that when I ran, I said, "I'm only running for one term." I don't believe that a politician should serve but one term, in any office, President, whatever. I think they ought to lengthen the presidency to, say six years. Then he runs on his platform, his promises. You give him a good amount of time to do it, and then he's through. Any politician that runs for a second term has to compromise himself to be reelected. I don't care who it is. All the little ladies who voted for me, by the way, when I got elected to city council, they would not have voted for me again after I voted against the cock-house, or the historical street in San Marcos. They would not have voted for me again. So, if I'd have been smart, I would have said, "Sure, I think this is wonderful wasting money on this little house or spending all this time and all on Historical Street," when the streets all over San Marcos had chuck holes so big you couldn't drive without having to go down and get your car re-aligned. Now, this is the problem that I've found in San Marcos. I fought it, I did everything I could. I took on LCRA [Lower Colorado River Authority] singlehanded. The big vote I finally won after the Supreme Court had ruled against us, but they had thirty days in which to think. I had a one-man campaign against them. I made a song up about LCRA. I used the press with me because they like agitators, and I was an agitator then. I made the Supreme Court change. It was four to five, I think, against us. They [LCRA] said that they had the right to fix our rates, and the Constitution of Texas said that the city had the right to fix the rates. I just said, either the Constitution's not worth the paper it's written on, or—and LCRA was just up there, powerful, big, and they called themselves a quasi-governmental agency. They had powerful lawyers and all, and we put the pressure on the Supreme Court, and they changed their decision, after their own decision. I won two times. I got the old folks their taxes, and I got LCRA put in place.

The other thing I wanted to do, and they wouldn't listen to me. I warned them about the energy crisis about a year, no, six or seven months before, really. I wanted to take Oscar Wyatt to task,

the guy that owned Lavaca [Lavaca Gathering Company] that ran up all the prices and broke *all* the contracts. I wanted to bring him into court, into our city council—we had the power of investigation. I said bring Oscar Wyatt and Lavaca and all this big oil that had broke all their state contracts; see, they had contracts with the state for twenty years, and they just broke them.

Leethy: Lavaca, is that centered around here?

Dibrell: Lavaca was a big gathering company for natural gas. All the contracts, he [Oscar Wyatt] just said, “I’m sorry, it’s costing us more than that, we’re going to break our contract.” And they let him do it! The Railroad Commission was the one that ran it then, now it’s the Public Utilities Commission. They said, Well, okay, you need more money, we’ll give it to you. I said, “Hey, wait a minute, you can’t do that to us. You can’t just take our electric bills of \$30 and make it \$150 all over night.” But that’s what they did all over Texas, but especially there in San Marcos and LCRA, and I raised cane.

Leethy: I think we need to turn this [tape] over real fast before it stops.

End Side 1, begin Side 2

Dibrell: Okay, all I wanted to do—in our city charter, we have the power of investigation, and all I wanted to do was to bring Oscar Wyatt and his gathering company, a big, powerful company, in and show us their books, which we had the right to do. Oh, the city council said, Oh, we’re too small. Oh, we can’t do this sort of thing.

But do you realize, Amy, if every little town in Texas had done the same thing that I wanted to do, we could have destroyed Lavaca by strictly the legal rules. Every little community has the power of investigation. If we had made them haul their books in and fight the legal battle, and we’d have done this in five thousand different little towns in Texas, Lavaca would have backed off, and we would have been paying \$40 and \$50 electric rates instead of \$200. Did you know that?

Leethy: No, I didn’t realize—

Dibrell: Sure you can, you’ve got to fight. But, the point is—is this railroad commission—they [Lavaca] broke the laws of the land. You can’t break a contract, a legal contract, but they did—just like LCRA. They came in and said, We’re going to set your rates, and I said, “No, you’re not.” I had already planned on taking the Constitution of Texas and going out in front of City Hall and burning it if that [court decision] hadn’t been changed the other way. I already threatened them. I would have said, “It’s not worth the paper it’s written on.” The point of this is: the San Marcos Council has been spineless. I sat up there on that council, and it was really neat. By the way, they send you a packet out on Thursday, the day before the Monday meeting. They used to have a policeman drive out in a police car and give it to me. I told them to stop that with me. I said, “That policeman ought to be out chasing criminals. I’ll go get my packet.” I guess the

others liked the prestige. I don't know why, but, nevertheless—alright, he had all this time, he had Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday to go out and take a look at these places [those that were to be discussed at the Monday council meeting] and all. Amy, so help me, 90% of the time, most of those councilmen never opened up their packets until they sat down at the council meeting Monday night, including the mayor. That ticked me off. A good thirty-minute meeting lasted three and a half hours because they were asking questions on things that they should have found out. What I'm saying is, if you're going to run for an office, they don't pay you, it's a public service; *you ought to do it right*. I mean, that's a problem we've got. It's an ego trip for some people. You got all kinds that run for city council, but you have the vested interest, and these people were not really worried about, you know, the good of the town. They were interested in the little kickbacks they'd give to the people so they'd vote for them, the little blocks of votes. Well, I cared less; I wasn't going to run for re-election. I think that this is a problem. Do you have any questions? I'm sort of running out of soap on this one.

Leethy: No, I don't have any questions about that. I understand your philosophy.

Dibrell: Well, what I'm saying is this: I really believe that every American citizen owes a certain amount of time, service to their government. I like the British system because of the fact that they feel like every citizen should give to the government as well as the government give to them. I'm very strong on military service. I really feel like that we all ought to participate. I believe in universal military training, right out of high school. I think a boy ought to go six months in the military, get some training, and stay in the reserves for five or six years. If they're crippled, and they have some problem like that, if they'd find something for them do so they can say that, I've given something into this organization. I really believe that the ones who pay into something get more out of it than the ones who don't. I really do. I think that's bad philosophy when you got too many people that look on the government as only a one-way road to them. I think you ought to serve on commissions. You ought to serve. I really felt a moral obligation to serve.

When it comes to education, I'm very liberal. When I ran for the legislature I was defeated. The teachers would have had one whale of a fighting candidate up there in the legislature. Yet, I don't believe in spending money unless it goes for something that's *valid*. I'm a fiscal conservative. But, I'm really interested in the good of everyone. You're not better than your weakest link. So, if you just work for one group, you really haven't helped the city of the county or the state anywhere. I really feel like that we've made politics and office service—and I blame the media on this a lot—it's an unpleasant take to be a public servant. They're not getting the highest quality people to run because of the abuse they take. I did it because of a deep conviction plus the fact of curiosity. I was curious of whether a person could run for office, with a platform, with certain convictions, and stay there for three years, and get out without compromising. It can be done, but you've got to have a thick hide, and by the way, it wasn't long after this I had a heart attack. It's pretty frustrating. I said, of serving on the city council, when someone asked me

about my feelings about it, I said, “It’s an experience, just like going to Korea, that I’m glad I had, but I don’t ever plan to go back.”

Leethy: You feel like you accomplished something but it—

Dibrell: I don’t know whether I accomplished anything. But I’ll tell you one thing—I resigned early because the home that I lived in was owned by the estate of my family, and when my mother died, my family wanted to sell it. I’d already built this little place up here. I felt like I didn’t want to fix that old home over. I wanted to move up here eventually, so I resigned. I waited until after they couldn’t cost the money for a re-election just for a few months for me. I waited until that 120 days, it was right at the last part of—and did you know that that city council, those six people, voted to keep me on even though I wasn’t a citizen of San Marcos, and I had to say no again. So evidently, they appreciated me even though they, in some ways—

Leethy: —voted against you a lot?

Dibrell: Yeah. I don’t know—but, until we get young people along the line to have a philosophy of this and to make it, just like teaching that we talked about earlier, something that’s respected, that it gets a higher caliber, higher-qualified people. Then when these people get the office that they do something with it and that they’re not dependent. I think when they start running for a second term, they dissipate their whole cause. I think they ought to have one term and go in there and do what you said you were going to do. By the way, the things that I said I was going to do, I did. Now, some of them didn’t pass. I fought real strong on these zonings. I’m a firm believer that a man’s home is his castle. I don’t care whether it’s a shack or a mansion. I don’t think he ought to have a beer joint next door to him or a big industry that makes his property unpleasant as a residency. I fought battle after battle when they tried to move in, rezoning and so on. There was one that they wanted to give a liquor-license type of zoning right across from the high school, and this person promised and so on down the line that he would not open it until five o’clock, that he was such a fine Christian man and so on down the line. I still voted against him because I said that when you vote a zoning change, it’s forever, and this man may sell the place, which he did, two years later. That piece of property right now could be a beer joint right across from the high school. The high school has got enough problems. At that time, eighteen-year-olds, your seniors, could go over and have a beer during their off-periods, and the teachers have enough problems without having to deal with drunk students who can get alcohol right across the street from the school. I mean, this is the sort of thing that frustrated me. By the way, they passed it. It was six to one. I was the only one who voted against it.

Now, apathy, of course, is something you always have to deal with. This big fight I had with LCRA and their rates—I finally said, “Okay, you people from LCRA come here to the city council and answer these people’s questions.” I had over a 150, 200 people call me about their bills. We put it in the paper. We had it on the radio—“If you have questions, come down to the city hall, to the meeting, because we’ve got LCRA and their books and their people there.”

Eleven people showed up. By the way, two of those were ones I threatened—they were professors of mine, I threatened them with their lives because they were always griping to me over coffee about their bills. I said, “I don’t want to hear any more of it unless you come to the meeting.” They were there. So, there were nine other than that that were concerned citizens.

Leethy: Do you think the problem with that is that the media is really ineffective here. I mean, most people don’t even read the *San Marcos Daily Record*, they read the Austin paper or—

Dibrell: Well, the quality of the news media has some bearing on it—the radio station, the only time I ever listened to KCNY was when we had a flood. They did a beautiful job of telling people where the water was up, where it was down, where people were stranded, this sort of thing. I never listen to KCNY, that radio station there. The newspapers—they’re mediocre, but, like I say, that’s not an indictment to them. I say most of them are mediocre. Let me tell you what about newspapers ought to be. The news ought to be on the news sections, and the editorial ought to be in the editorial section. We’ve got too much editorial that seeped over on the news section. The facts ought to be put on the news. Opinions ought to be put on the editorial section. But we have—the writing today is slanted, and when reporting is slanted it becomes opinion, it becomes editorial. I think, if you wanted to boil it down, I think that we have too many news stories that are slanted. They tell you things that want you to think a certain way instead of saying, “This is the way it is.” My philosophy as a teacher was to teach students to think. I taught debate, public speaking, and so on. They said, “I bet you had them all conservative.” I said, “No.” I said, “I taught them to think, I didn’t tell them what to think.” Out of my students that have graduated, I have one that ended up out in Berkeley as a communist leader, outstanding young lady, brilliant. She’s using her public speaking to foster communism. I have had some that are very conservative lawyers. I never changed anyone’s deep political—but I tell you what, I did make them think.

Any time I teach a student, I’m going to force them into thinking, and you know, this is hard to do nowadays because I think it is so easily done for us by the media. They decide what clothes we wear. We don’t have to worry about it. We just watch what the trends are. We see what all of Hollywood is wearing. All this stuff—the cars you drive—the way you think, it’s all done for you, just turn on a button. You don’t even have to go and turn the set on, you just have a little handset now, and you just push it. You can get lazy in thinking, and this can cost you democracy. You see, democracy is a very delicate thing. You’ve got anarchy on one side, and you’ve got tyranny on the other, or dictatorship. It’s a fine line in between there, what democracy is. You become apathetic or slide on these two poles on the other ends pull you one way or the other. It concerns you, a whole lot. If people would think and think of others—what’s good for everybody actually makes it good for you. That’s good government but government that has to go into every walk; it deprives us of doing anything. When we get to the place where there’s a person down the road that’s sick, that doesn’t have any money that needs help, that we say, “I paid my taxes and there’s a social action agency of some kind that’s going to take care of that.” Then we’re no

better than Charles Dickens's Scrooge when he said, "Aren't there any poor houses?" when one of the solicitors came by in the old Christmas story. I always see a Scrooge saying, "Well, I took care of that, there's a poor house, let the government take care of it." That's not good. Churches ought to be involved in these Meals on Wheels. They are now some. Ladies are just looking for things to do. They take the meal out. You don't need a director and an assistant director and a secretary and an IBM typewriter if you've got a community that's participating. This little town of Wimberley, by the way, is strong on participation. They're now getting ready to incorporate, and it's a good thing because they will have zoning out of it, which will protect some of the property. This community, they have a library, a beautiful library, I mean a big, beautiful library. They've got them an EMS program that's second to none. They've got several ambulances. They've got a fire district that is so good that they conducted their own fire classes here, which have all been conducted up at A&M up to this date; the little town of Wimberley—no incorporation, no taxes, but when people get sick they go and help, the community and church. I don't think it's going to last forever because there are too many people that will come in, but for so long it has worked. The only thing about incorporation would be a good thing in terms of problems with sewage and water supply and zoning.

Leethy: You think it will ruin the community though?

Dibrell: No, I think it's a good thing because I think that a limited government here is needed. Because, one of these days, you see it's a dry community, and if it ever goes wet, which I look for it to, over a period of time, then a beer joint could be right next to a church if there's no zoning. I think if they have a small, limited government where they can say, "Okay, there's going to be beer joints. They're going to be on this road where it's not close to the churches or schools or this sort of thing." If they're going to have certain kinds of industry, they're going to have to be here, and this is residential section, and we're going to keep it that way. That in itself is worth incorporating for.

It may sound in this interview that I'm a bitter person. I don't want that. I don't want you to think that I'm mad at someone and that's the reason I moved. That's not true either. I love San Marcos, it's a fine community, and I've got many friends there. That doesn't mean that I can't see things that are wrong and want to do something. I can honestly say, when I come to the end of the line, that I at least gave it a shot, and I really think that other people ought to give it a shot, too. It's not too much fun. It was a job to do. It was interesting to me because I like this sort of thing, I like people, working with them, but it's such a needed thing. We've got so many bright people in San Marcos who feel just like I do, that they want to do something, but the thing that's keeping them out is being misquoted in the press. Now, this last governor's election we just got through with, we've gone now to negative campaigning where you just run down the other person. This is sad, because I think, frankly, that we could have higher quality senators, congressmen, presidents, if they just weren't under a gun. The poor president, he can't go out with his dog into the rose garden without being bombarded with, "Why did you do this? Did you sell arms to Iran

to get the hostages out?” and so on down the line. There’s no privacy. They were jumping on him because he didn’t do anything about the hostages, and when he tries to do something, they’re all over him. Some of the things people say about politicians are really uncalled for, I mean, some of the terms that they use. I think that there are some people that are crooked. I think that there are some people who are inept and stupid, but I don’t think that a person who takes time to help has just those qualifications. I think there’s some good people. I think we need more. I think that it’s just like teaching. You’ve got to improve the—

Leethy: Motivation?

Dibrell: Well, yeah, and the concept of people. You hear too much of “He’s just a teacher,” instead of saying, “*He is a teacher.*” You see? “This man is a city councilman. Man, he has really gotten this town going. We’ve got some industry in the town, we’re seeing the roads paved, we’re getting water out at Westover.” This sort of thing, *this* is a person we’re proud of. Instead of saying “He’s another politician. He’s a crook.” In other words, the term politician now, is—

Leethy: —derogatory.

Dibrell: —is a derogatory thing. It’s like people that were vocational teachers. That term vocational has become “he is a second-class teacher for second-class students.” That’s not so. A boy could have 140 IQ that cares less about going to an academic college and studying history and batting around, archeology and so on. What he wants to do is get in there and work on motors. Wouldn’t it be nice just to have a counselor, and everybody say, Hey, being a mechanic is a great thing, and if you go to this top-level technical school, don’t call it vocational because that’s a dirty word—technical school. Wouldn’t you like to have a 140 IQ man working on your car? Yeah, it would be nice; wouldn’t you like to have some people that are 140 IQs, that don’t want to go to college, to be happy in mechanics? Right now, the pressure is the other way. Counselors say, Oh, you’re too smart to do this. What do they mean “too smart to be a mechanic;” we need smart mechanics. This is the thing that bothers me—labels and so on down the line. My own children, I take what interest they wanted. My oldest boy, he loved mechanics, so he went to the Navy, and he went to Waco to a technical school, and he got him an associate’s degree in mechanics. My daughter loved flowers, so she went to A&M and got a floriculture degree. My youngest son, he’s at A&M now, and he had an appointment to West Point, and he got knocked out on his math grade. He wants to be a professional soldier and a history teacher. He’s going to be a history teacher when he serves thirty years. So, he’s at A&M. I try to encourage people to do what they want to do. I don’t think you should try to make people in molds.

San Marcos has got to get away from having so many different vested interests. They’ve got to put first things first: getting some good, clean industry in San Marcos to get a job market for the people that are there. It’s very important. If they think they’re going to side with all their different, little groups, and so on down the line, they’re never going to be successful. Right now,

they're not. They're fighting at each other's throats, and they've done that forever. The sad part about it is, Amy, that one, they should be ashamed of themselves, this small group that used the Latins. I taught the Latins; by the way, many of them voted for me for city council or I would have never won because they knew me individually, even though that block vote told them to vote the other way. It's time that we really meet the basic needs and not our egotism. San Marcos is a beautiful location. It's got so many possibilities. It needs some strong leadership, and I don't feel like that leadership right now is adequate. I really think that they're going to have to get some quality people to take off their time and really—and run for one term where they don't have to make compromises from politicians. They should just go in there and say, Look, we're going to clean this thing up. We're not going to say, Is this going to satisfy this group? so they [the interest group] would be happy. We're going to say, Does this make San Marcos a better place? Until they do that, they're going to be in chaos.

Leethy: So, is that like a wrap-up statement from you?

Dibrell: Yes.

Leethy: Okay, well thanks for your time.

Dibrell: Okay, does that [the interview content] help any?

Leethy: Uh-huh, that was fine.

End of interview