INTERVIEW WITH DIANNE DUNCAN (1 OF 2)

Carson Wright: Ready to get started?

Michelle Lopez: Mm-hmm (affirmative), everyone ready? Okay, good. Yeah, so my name's Michelle Lopez.

CW: I am Carson Wright and we are here with ...

Dianne Duncan: Dianne Duncan.

CW: ... in her office in Austin, Texas. We are conducting an interview for the Austin Women's Activism Oral History project. It's March 28, 2019.

ML: Yeah, all right, so you said previously you were at UT from 1966 to 1983? Okay.

DD: Yes, off and on.

ML: Off and on? Okay.

DD: Some of that time, I didn't even live here.

ML: Okay, yeah, so I remember previously when we talked in our preliminary interview that you said you were raised in South Texas, correct?

DD: Correct.

ML: Yeah, where specifically in South Texas?

DD: McAllen.


DD: Back when the border was quite porous.

ML: Ah, okay. Yeah, I remember you also said that living in South Texas, being raised in South Texas influenced a lot of your political views.

DD: I think so. I don't know that it was my ... I come from a family of Republicans back when there was what they called Yellow Dog Democrats that became Republicans. My family were always Republicans, but in today's world, you'd probably call them a Bush Republican, they were more business people.

CW: Okay.

DD: But my mother was the kind of woman that did a lot of ... it certainly wasn't protests, but she did a lot of public civics stuff, so she was always the precinct
chairman and I was raised to think that voting was not only my right, but my responsibility and my family talked about politics at the dinner table. And she would have me do certain things, a lot of volunteer work and the school that I went to, the middle class was on one side of town and my side of town was closer to the border and it was where ... I don't want to say my family was rich, but what wealth there was was around us.

DD: People had horses and bigger houses and people had ranches and so, I was exposed to the wealth that there was around there and the political people who were politically connected, so I got exposed at an early age that if you had money, you got certain things. But I also went to school with the migrant farm worker kids, both Anglos and Mexicans and the Mexican kids, if they were more affluent, they would come across and go to school.

DD: And in fact, the term "wet back" back then simply meant that somebody crossed back and forth from the border.

CW: Right.

DD: Right? And so, I remember one time I watched this boy, I remember his name was Jaime and he was writing so small and I said, "Jaime, what are you doing?" And he said, "Well, paper's very expensive," he's from Reynosa and it's like, both sides. So, I was exposed to that kind of discrepancy and I would say that that's ... I never liked it, it never felt like. My father probably didn't care, but I don't think my mother liked it either and I don't know if she ... she didn't really approve of my choices as an adult, but she helped create the person that did not think that was right or fair.

CW: Okay.

DD: So, I appreciate that from her.

ML: Do you feel like your views ... like you were individual in your views or was it a widespread sentiment that there was injustice?

DD: No, I mean I was around ... I lived in a family with three Bentsen families, that's Senator Lloyd Bentsen, so no. I was the kid that was looking around going, "What is ... this is a weird place, weird things are happening." I stopped having birthdays at nine years old, because they would not allow me to invite one of my Mexican friends.

ML: Oh, wow.

DD: I said, "Okay, well if I can't invite who I want, I just won't have them."

ML: Yeah.
But I've always been ... I'm not that kind of person that needs other people to tell me I'm okay. So, I can't say that I really stood out in any particular way, didn't feel that way, but I was just a child kind of collecting information.

1966, that was sort of interesting, because my family moved to San Antonio when I started high school and let's just forget those four years. And so then, I started UT and I think the interesting thing about this is how quickly the culture changed, because when I started UT, girls were not allowed-- if you were a good girl, whatever that was, and I would've considered myself a "good girl"-- to wear pants. You had to wear skirts and dresses.

Social, that was the social norms for "good girls," whatever that was. But everybody, of course, wanted to be a good girl and I pledged in a sorority and the purpose of pledging in a sorority's so you can go to fraternity parties and get drunk. That's what it seemed like it was ... it was a party thing and my grades reflected that.

And so, by the second semester, I had pretty much ... I didn't flunk out of UT, I was smart enough to drop out and then I got a job and then, kind of later in the semester, I had a weekend party with three of my other pledges and it lasted all weekend and all I know is by the end of that weekend, I had ... all of us had been kicked out of our apartment and I already was out of UT and lost my job, because I fell asleep at the job, because I was hungover.

I think you get the picture. So, that was the scene and when I went to high school it was sock hops. You ever see a TV show called "Happy Days"?

Okay, let me just tell you that's how it was. And I remember there was no Internet, people had TIME Magazine, they had Reader's Digest, you would watch ... your family would watch together on Sunday night and watch the Ed Sullivan Show where I saw the Beatles and I heard Bob Dylan when I was, I think a junior and all I knew was there are people out there who are not like these people and what can I do to meet these people?

There was the coast, there was no third coast. There was the West Coast, there was the East Coast and all of us in between, that's all we ... there was no way to get any information. It was on TV, it was just none of us knew anything, right? So, I think I entered UT hungry for stuff and just not knowing what to do and I
think I just, like a lot of kids, because I didn't know what to do and I was just trying to fit in, just drank and partied for the first year.

DD: Now, fast forward. That's what UT was like, I wasn't different than anyone else. That was 1966, so I went to Texas Tech for a year to get my grades up, that didn't work out either, but doesn't matter. Then, I went back to San Antonio Junior College and worked to get my grades up to get back into UT, so when I came back to UT, it was the winter, it was January of 1969. So, that's what, two and a half years from when I started in '66. At that point, everything was different.

DD: It was like somebody turned a light bulb on. Students were protesting, everybody was dressing informally, everything was different. I went to the Chuck Wagon, I ran into a girl that was at the Student Union. There was no coffee houses, you'd go there and have coffee and hang out and I ran into a girl that I had known, she was a couple of years older than me at a boarding house. And she took me over to a co-op with some friends that she knew who were students and this was the Plan 2 House.

DD: And that boy, who was a student, sold me my first marijuana and gave me LSD, some LSD, and off I went. And then, I started protesting. So, I'm just telling you it's like a light bulb went on. There was no gradual anything. When it hit, I don't know exactly when it hit, but for me, it was when I came back to Austin, so it was not sudden, it was like ... I'm not thinking a lot of the way in which I was raised was that different than somebody 10, 20, 30, 40, it just really wasn't that much different.

DD: Women were expected to be married. My family didn't even give me a middle name, because you would just lose it when you got married. Nice girls go to college to get their MRS. My mother didn't work outside the home, that was what I thought was the normal thing to do and my attitude from day one was I never want to get married. I didn't know how to interpret it any other way other than this doesn't look like something I want.

DD: There was no exposure to any other culture, I was never exposed to any gay culture. Every once in a while, I'd be around a man or a woman that felt different, I didn't have the words for it or the understanding of it, but I could ... it was butch and femme days, so the men were really, really drag queens and really flippant and the women were I don't know, they were the type of, I call them an old-fashioned bull dyke.

DD: They had rolled-up sleeves with the cigarette pack here or here. That was the scene that I came out into, but if you saw that, I just didn't have the words for it. I just knew that these people were different. I didn't identify with them, you understand, but then I didn't understand with where I was, so I like a lot of kids, was trying to find my tribe, my people.
CW: Was that scene present in Austin in 1966 or was it just when you came back?

DD: When I came back. So, 1966, if it was, it was such a small part. They were off doing their own thing, but your average student was my experience. We lived in dorms, we went to parties, kids have always gone to parties and drank too much and got alcohol. I lost track, they kept changing the date when you could or you couldn't, but it didn't block any of us.

DD: Back then, if girls got pregnant, abortion was not legal. Girls disappeared, nobody talked about it. I didn't find even out until I was an adult woman, a middle-aged woman that a lot of women I knew had had children and given them up for adoption. You didn't talk about it. It was not spoken. I'm not saying it didn't happen, but it was not spoken about. Good girls and good families don't talk about these things.

DD: So, everything that was kind of undercover, there was this sheen of cultural norms and you could do it, because the world was a simpler place. Remember, a single channel of information: network TV. Walter Cronkite would tell us what was happening in the world and we would watch the Ed Sullivan Show for entertainment and here's your TIME Magazine with the pictures and your Reader's Digest and you would go to the church of whatever your family went to.

DD: It was ... the information was controlled, so if there dissent in the people that were living like that, which we've always had, those people were in one of those coastal areas, right? They were not here or they were holed up closeted in their little whatever, so you didn't really ... you were minimally exposed to it. Let me go pull her needles. She can paint another time, just going to pull her needles.

CW: Okay.