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Interview with
NIPAWAN TEEPANONT
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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas
Interviewer: Diane Bohlcke
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(Signature)
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Oral History Collection

Nipawan Teepanont

Interviewer: Diane Bohlcke

Date of Interview: February 17, 1984

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Bohlcke: Nipawan, just for me, would you say your whole name?

Teepanont: Ni - pah - won Tee - pah - non.

Bohlcke: And where were you born?

Teepanont: Sakon Nakorn, Thailand.

Bohlcke: And where is that in Thailand?

Teepanont: Northeastern part of Thailand.

Bohlcke: Okay. You have a big family? A small family?

Teepanont: I have a small family.

Bohlcke: Would you tell me about them?

Teepanont: I have one sister, older sister, and myself. Because my mother passed away since I was a year old, I lived with my grandmother.

Bohlcke: And the place you came from, is that a big place?

Teepanont: A small place.

Bohlcke: What do they do mostly?

Teepanont: Mostly farming.

Bohlcke: And did you go to school in the town?

Teepanont: Yes, I went to school in town.

Bohlcke: For how many years?

Teepanont: Elementary school, four years, secondary school for six years, and teachers training for two years.

Bohlcke: Did you get your teacher training in the town where you lived?

Teepanont: No, only two years.

Bohlcke: Two years. And then did you go away?

Teepanont: Yes, I went to the States to study. I had an American Field Service Scholarship. Then I came here to study in Connecticut for one year.

Bohlcke: Oh, you did? And then you came here?

Teepanont: No.

Bohlcke: You went back home?

Teepanont: I went back home. I went to study in Bangkok for two years at teachers training, also, but at a higher level. After that I went to the south of Thailand to complete my bachelor's degree--two more years.

Bohlcke: The part down on the peninsula?

Teepanont: Yes.

Bohlcke: Down in there?

Teepanont: Yes, Penang. In Malaysia.

Bohlcke: Then did you teach?

Teepanont: Yes, I teach. I came back to my province. I teach at a teachers college.

Bohlcke: What's the name of the teachers college?

Teepanont: Sakon Nakorn Teachers College.

Bohlcke: Sakon Nakorn? Tell me a little bit about what life was like in your town. What kind of things did you do for fun?

Teepanont: Life in my town is very nice and peaceful. You don't have to be in a hurry all the time. You don't have to be rush all the time. You can take your time. Like, suppose you teach at nine o'clock in the morning. You can go to school at 8:30, something like that. You don't have to be afraid that there is going to be a traffic jam, something like that.

And if I did something for fun, I went to the movies. There are three theaters in my town.

Bohlcke: What religion is your family?

Teepanont: Buddhist.

Bohlcke: Buddhist? Are most people...

Teepanont: Yes, most people are Buddhist. About 39 percent in my province are Buddhists.

Bohlcke: What other religions are there?

Teepanont: Christian, Catholic,

Bohlcke: Very much?

Teepanont: Only 1 percent.

Bohlcke: Why did you decide to come to America?

Teepanont: Because I was bored with my teaching for twelve years. I taught at my college for two years and a half, and I went to do my masters in the Philippines. I came back and I studied for two years and a half, and I get bored. I don't like to stay in the same place but a few years. There were

things I didn't like in my college, like administrators. I don't like them, so I decided to study higher education administration, so I can come back and change something.

Bohlcke: What don't you like about them?

Teepanont: Over there?

Bohlcke: Yes.

Teepanont: It's different from here, from the States. I don't know how to say...like, over there the people who try to please the boss will get benefits from them.

Bohlcke: Yes.

Teepanont: If we work hard, and you don't try to please the boss, you know, you just stay at the same level. You do not go up, even though how hard you work. They don't look at what you do. They look at other things that you do in the college, like, please the boss.

Bohlcke: You think we're different here?

Teepanont: Yes, you are different. You confront people. If you work hard or they are good people...if they help the people at the job they do or the work they do or they be good enough... you teach good and you will get good benefits here in the States, but not over there, no matter how hard you teach students. Administrators over there will look for other things, like, you have to be social people and try to please the boss and have a good mouth, you know, speak nice.

Bohlcke: Yes.

Teepanont: You will then go higher.

Bohlcke: Why did you choose North Texas?

Teepanont: At the beginning, I never thought of coming here, but I chose it because I knew from my friends that here the tuition is low compared to the north of America where it is, you know, so much different. So I decided to come here ...and, also, North Texas is a good school. I have heard from my American friends that it's a good school for education.

Bohlcke: Let's see now. When did you get here?

Teepanont: August of 1982.

Bohlcke: That's what? About a year-and-a-half?

Teepanont: A year-and-a-half.

Bohlcke: How long are you going to stay?

Teepanont: I think two more years because I'm going to finish my classwork this semester.

Bohlcke: And then...

Teepanont: The dissertation, yes.

Bohlcke: And your major is...

Teepanont: Higher education administration.

Bohlcke: When you first got here, did you have a lot of adjustments to make to our culture? Things like the food and...

Teepanont: As I told you before, I used to be here when I was seventeen years old, so it is not that difficult for me. But this time I came here, I have to help myself. At that time I

didn't have to help myself because I stayed with my American family, and I went to high school. Everybody took care of me. But here, I have to help myself. I have to learn how to drive a car here.

Bohlicke: Oh? Do you have a car?

Teepanont: Yes, I have a car. In Thailand, I don't have a car. I have a motorcycle.

Bohlicke: What about the climate? It's a lot different from the North where you went to high school.

Teepanont: Yes, very different. Over there, the weather is very cold, and, you know, you can see the difference in summer, winter, and spring...in fall, you know, the leaves are so beautiful. The trees are so beautiful over there. In winter the pond became ice (chuckle).

Bohlicke: Is our climate a lot different from Thailand's climate?

Teepanont: In summer, no, just about the same. In winter it's a lot different. It's about fifteen degrees Fahrenheit. It's very cold because we don't have warm houses like here. Like here, you got a heater, but over there people don't have heaters, so there is suffering in winter.

Bohlicke: When you came here, how did you know where to live?

Teepanont: I know a friend of my friend (chuckle). So he want to pick me up at the airport, you know, and then I stay with him for five days when I was looking for an apartment. At the beginning, I stay by myself. I was very lonely.

Bohlcke: Now you have a roommate?

Teepanont: Yes, I have a roommate.

Bohlcke: She's from Thailand?

Teepanont: She's from Thailand.

Bohlcke: Well, did you make friends right away with other Thai students?

Teepanont: Yes, we have many Northern Thai students, so they come and talk to me.

Bohlcke: Try to make you feel more comfortable?

Teepanont: Comfortable,

Bohlcke: What did North Texas do for you when you came here, in the way of helping you with the paperwork, you know, filling out all the forms and getting your visa to come to school, that kind of thing? Do you remember?

Teepanont: What do you mean by that? I don't understand. When I came here or when I was in Thailand?

Bohlcke: Well, both,

Teepanont: Both.

Bohlcke: Before you came...

Teepanont: Oh, one reason why the Thai students like to come here is because North Texas gives the I-20 Form very easily.

Bohlcke: Yes.

Teepanont: You know, especially when the people who graduate with a master's degree from America, they don't need the TOEFL in order to get the I-20 form, but they need it after the students come here. They mail it to students right after

they apply for it. They get the I-20 Form so they can be able to come here to the States, and after that they can go somewhere else if they don't like it here. They apply somewhere else.

Bohlcke: So then after you got here, what kind of things did North Texas do for you to make it more pleasant for you here? Anything?

Teepanont: I don't know, but I have heard many...to me, I don't think they do much for me, no. Especially, too, I have heard from students who go to other universities, like, in North. They say that over there it is very nice. The universities and the people there are more friendly than at North Texas.

Bohlcke: North Texas is not very friendly?

Teepanont: No-o-o. But they say that they came here because the tuition is low, and the weather is nice.

Bohlcke: Well, what kind of good experiences have you had since you got here?

Teepanont: Ah, good experiences...I got it since I changed my major. Because I wanted I-20 Form, as I told you before, I applied for a major in secondary education, and then I was not happy in secondary education. I was very suffering when I first studied secondary education. Probably I did not get a good teacher, understanding teacher, that understood foreigners, you know, so I decided to change my major. After I changed my major, I became happy because the people in

higher education are more open-minded.

Bohlcke: So the faculty made all the difference, not the subject matter?

Teepanont: No, the faculty. I'm a teacher before. I know that any subject, you can make it easy for anyone, but it depends on the people who teach it. They can make it hard, or they can make it easy. It depends on the the teacher.

Bohlcke: What about the other students?

Teepanont: What do you mean? Foreign students?

Bohlcke: Yes, what kind of treatment do you get from the other foreign students?

Teepanont: Well, very nice from foreign students and also from my classmates. They are all nice. I have never had any problems with my classmates.

Bohlcke: That's wonderful.

Teepanont: Yes, I think so. I'm lucky. They are all nice.

Bohlcke: What about the people in Denton that are not connected to the University?

Teepanont: I had a bad experience when I went to the Department of Public Safety, like I told you in class. The people over there, are very unfriendly, especially to foreigners, because probably of the other language, you know. They might not understand, so they got mad.

Bohlcke: And what did they say?

Teepanont: They just scolded.

Bohlcke: They scolded you?

Teepanont: Yes, they scolded me, too, one time because they told me to raise my hand, you know, when I was applying for my ID card. I didn't hear, you know, perfectly, so I didn't raise my hand. She said it twice, and I was shocked (chuckle). So I didn't understand until my Thai friend told me to raise my hand. Then I raised my hand and said, "I'm sorry." I told my friend and my classmates, and they say that these people are...you know, they feel unsafe. That's why they did that.

Bohlcke: Unsafe?

Teepanont: Yes, they are unhappy, probably.

Bohlcke: You mean with their own lives?

Teepanont: Yes, with their own lives. So I was not to feel bad, they told me. They were talking, my American friends, in the cafeteria, and they said, "Don't worry! They treat me like that too!" (laughter)

Bohlcke: Well, what about other places in town, like, when you go to the store?

Teepanont: No, I don't think I have any trouble anymore. No problem.

Bohlcke: In the beginning?

Teepanont: In the beginning, no, I don't think so.

Bohlcke: Was it hard for you when you first came here and you had to get an apartment and went out and buy things that you needed for your apartment?

- Teepanont: At the beginning, I have a friend who took care of me.
He took me to the supermarket to buy things.
- Bohlcke: So he kind of showed you around?
- Teepanont: Yes, he showed me around, but I felt that I needed a car because if I walked, then it would take me a long time.
- Bohlcke: Was it hard to buy a car?
- Teepanont: It was easier than in Thailand. In Thailand a car is very expensive because of the government. You have to pay a lot of tax. But here it's easy to buy a car. In Thailand it's easy to buy a motorcycle (laughter):
- Bohlcke: The International Office at North Texas...what kind of things did they do to improve the experiences that international students have here?
- Teepanont: I don't know.
- Bohlcke: What would make life better for you if they were to help you?
- Teepanont: Yes, they should give more help than this. I don't think that they do much for foreign students.
- Bohlcke: What kind of help could they give?
- Teepanont: They should pay more attention to foreign students, like, try to find places to stay, something like that. Sometimes foreign students come, and they don't know anybody. They should give a hand, you know.
- Bohlcke: What else could they do?
- Teepanont: I cannot think right now. When something happens, I don't

ask for help from them. I always ask for help from other Thai students. But the people who come here alone don't have people from their own land. They will have problems about that, I believe.

Bohlcke: Do you think sometimes that because you're polite or because you and your friends from Thailand are polite, people take advantage of you here?

Teepanont: Nobody takes advantage from me, but I have heard from other people that Thai students, you know, themselves take advantage from Thai students.

Bohlcke: Oh, really?

Teepanont: Yes. Some people say that they like to be friends with foreigners rather than be friends with Thai people.

Bohlcke: Why?

Teepanont: Yesterday, I asked one of my friends who's from Thailand what am I supposed to answer Diane when she asks what bad experiences I have here. And he said, "Thai people!" (Chuckle) He said that. He told me that when he first came here, he was staying at Washington, D.C., and he was very lonely because he came from a rich family. He never did anything for himself. Everybody did it for him in Thailand, but when he first came here, he wished for someone to be his company. Then he went to their family--Thai people themselves, you know. He went to visit them, but they were not very friendly, he said. They didn't want to talk to him.

Probably they thought that he wanted something from them. That's why he got a very bad experience from Thai people. When he moved to North Texas, he didn't stay with a Thai. He has an American roommate now.

Bohlcke: But you don't feel that way about the Thai people?

Teepanont: To me I think that there are bad and good people everywhere, so I separate (chuckle).

Bohlcke: That sounds good to me. Would you recommend North Texas to other Thai people?

Teepanont: Yes, I recommend it to many Thai people.

Bohlcke: Just because of the low tuition?

Teepanont: The low tuition and the weather.

Bohlcke: What do you think about the quality of the education here?

Teepanont: The quality is also good. I tell them that. The quality also, you know, is acceptable in my country, especially in business. It is very well-known that the business school here is tops. Many people got their business degrees from North Texas. It is much better than at many universities.

Bohlcke: That's an important new thing in Thailand, isn't it, more people are going into...

Teepanont: Yes, to study business. Many Thai students come here to study business. My roommate came over here to study business, also.

Bohlcke: Are most of your friends education majors or...

Teepanont: Education majors because most of the people who came here

to North Texas to study education were teachers before. We are the same age, and we have the same experiences, and we can discuss things together when we have problems here.

Bohlcke: Have you made any American friends?

Teepanont: I don't think so in North Texas.

Bohlcke: Did you other places?

Teepanont: Yes, I have American friends, very close friends, because they used to be Peace Corps volunteers in my country, in my province. They are very, very good friends to me. One is in New York City. They call me up once a month. He calls me up once a month. One is in Spokane. He's a lawyer now. One is also in Davis, California. He's getting his Ph.D.

Bohlcke: I have a niece in Davis.

Teepanont: Really?

Bohlcke: I didn't know anyone knew anyone in Davis.

Teepanont: Yes, she's getting her Ph.D. in archeology.

Bohlcke: But you made these friends in Thailand?

Teepanont: Yes, I made these friends in Thailand. Also, as I told you before, I went to see my friend at the airport. That was the man that I met when I was an AFS student in California. I haven't seen him for sixteen years. I wrote him a letter two weeks ago, and he called me up, and he said that he was a computer repairman. He's also a teacher--teaches computer. He was on the way to Chicago, but he would stop to see me

at the airport, so I went to see him Wednesday at the airport.

Bohlcke: You've lived in the North, and you've lived in the Philippines as well as several places in Thailand. Have you done any other traveling in the United States?

Teepanont: When I was an AFS student, I did a lot because of the scholarship. It provided us to go many, many places. So I did a lot of traveling. When I was in Connecticut, I traveled in the six states in New England because my family took me, and after that, before I left for Thailand, the scholarship offered us to travel around the States, in a big bus, Greyhound bus, with other AFS students. The stay in each state was about three or four days--with an American family--so I got a lot of traveling at that time. But when I came here, I went to see my friend in Idaho Falls for Christmas, 1982, to visit his family for about almost a month.

Bohlcke: What part of the country do you like the best?

Teepanont: I think I like Connecticut. It's nice.

Bohlcke: Cold.

Teepanont: Cold, but it's nice (chuckle).

Bohlcke: What do you like about it the most?

Teepanont: The scenery. It's beautiful. My American family has got a cottage in Vermont, and in the winter and the fall they stay there over a week. It's beautiful over there! Also, in the summer they got a cottage near the beach, where I went swimming (chuckle) in summer. I like the beach. The

thing I like about it is its very beautiful.

Bohlcke: I know there are a lot of differences between Thailand and the United States, but what are the things you've noticed? Just tell me some of the differences that you've experienced.

Teepanont: You mean the people or the food?

Bohlcke: Yes.

Teepanont: (Chuckle) The food very different. Yes, the food is very different.

Bohlcke: Tell me how, I know that it is, but what kind of food...

Teepanont: The Thai people's main food is rice, and they have rice with every meal, but here in the States, you have potatoes. Also, your food is not as hot or spicy as our food. Our food is very spicy, very hot.

Bohlcke: What other kinds of differences do you see? How are the people different?

Teepanont: I think the people basically are the same. Yes, they are the same. I have a close friend, American. As I told you before, when I stay with my American family, they basically are the same. But the difference is, you know, that you people are more organized (chuckle).

Bohlcke: Talk about that a little. What do you mean, we're more organized?

Teepanont: (Chuckle) Organized, like, when you have a child, you teach them how to be in their certain way of life. You have to stay in a certain way of life (chuckle), but in Thailand,

when they have baby or anything, they just try to please them, even when they're a year or two or three years old. They just follow, "Eat! Eat!" (chuckle) Something like that. My American friend says that he could not stand that. In your country the child has to sit still and eat their own food, but in Thailand all I can say is that 95 percent treat their child very differently from here.

Bohlcke: Does that seem better to you?

Teepanont: I like the American way.

Bohlcke: You do?

Teepanont: Yes. But in Thailand they like it because we try to please the child a lot so the child will grow up. We never thought that they would grow up if they stay with their parents. They don't want their children to leave home, even if they are married, they want to keep them in the family. If they are rich, they just build a house and let them live in it (chuckle).

Bohlcke: How else are we organized? What other ways do you see that we're organized?

Teepanont: In work, too.

Bohlcke: How?

Teepanont: When you go to work in...you're supposed to work at eight o'clock. You just go on time probably and work, but some Thai people, if they supposed to work at eight, they probably go at nine, something like that. Thai life is very easy.

It just depends on "oh, never mind." "Mai pen rai," That's a book saying "never mind." Thais say, "Never mind."

Bohlcke: I've read that.

Teepanont: You've read that! (chuckle) Always, never mind.

Bohlcke: But you're always on time here. You're always on time.

Teepanont: Yes, here. Everybody's on time here in the States, but in Thailand, no.

Bohlcke: Was it hard for you to change?

Teepanont: No, I like to be on time. Even in Thailand, when I have an appointment with my friends, I'm always on time. If I'm not on time, I have to call them up. I let them know if something really happens. In Thailand we don't have that ...it's not so common in every...here you have...every house has telephone, but over there, no. But if I am late or anything else, I must go and apologize, really--deeply from my heart, you know.

Bohlcke: But is that different from other Thai people?

Teepanont: Not really. I really think that I'm different. That's what my American friends say. I am many things different from Thai people, too. He says that I am in between Thai and American.

Bohlcke: What other kinds of differences do you notice? You say people are more organized, and there're different kinds of food. What else?

Teepanont: The weather (chuckle).

Bohlcke: How's the weather different?

Teepanont: The weather is hot. No snow.

Bohlcke: Never?

Teepanont: No, never (chuckle).

Bohlcke: Even when it's really cold?

Teepanont: No.

Bohlcke: You have lots of rain.

Teepanont: Lot of rain.

Bohlcke: What is the name of the organization that you came over here with when you went to school earlier?

Teepanont: American Field Service.

Bohlcke: Okay.

Teepanont: AFS.

Bohlcke: Yes, that's what I thought you said. How did you get in touch with them? How did you find out about that?

Teepanont: Because at that time we have the examination in every province in Thailand. You know, I learned it from my American teacher. He's also a volunteer in my college, and he really encouraged me to take the exam. He told me to take exam; he took me to have interview (chuckle). He's a kindly man, I think, that teacher.

Bohlcke: If you hadn't come over here as an AFS student, do you think you would have come back to the United States or come originally to the United States to go to college later? Was it because you came earlier...?

Teepanont: Probably, probably. My reason that I came here was because I used to be here before and probably because, as I told you, I get bored, and I want to learn more about administrators.

Bohlcke: You think the United States is the best place to do that?

Teepanont: I think so. But when I return home, it will be difficult for me to change radically. I have to change a little bit... little by little...so they don't have to feel that they are changing...those people are changing.

Bohlcke: That'll be hard.

Teepanont: Yes, it'll be hard.

Bohlcke: It can't be easy to go to another country and study in a different language and have to live in a different kind of culture.

Teepanont: It's hard. It's hard.

Bohlcke: What's the hardest thing?

Teepanont: Language, I think, because I cannot explain how I really feel sometimes. When I'm sick, I want to tell the doctor how I feel. It's hard for me to tell the doctor. When I have problem with my bill, telephone bill, anything, you know, if I talk on the phone, I have a problem when they talk back to me, you know, because they talk so fast. So I have to get some American people to talk for me.

Bohlcke: What about in class?

Teepanont: In class? I have problems, too, but still we have some books to read,

- Bohlcke: You were telling me earlier about a class where you felt that you didn't understand the question. Would you tell me about that again?
- Teepanont: What class?
- Bohlcke: When you were talking earlier about the class where you made a grade you didn't like...in Dr. Kingery's class.
- Teepanont: Oh, the question? (Defend your reason, as an administrator, for choosing a pattern of organization for your institution.)
- Bohlcke: Yes. Tell me about that.
- Teepanont: Ah, that question (chuckle). I haven't talked to Dr. Kingery yet, so I don't feel bad about that. Probably because I didn't understand the question, that's why I answered it wrongly. I think all Thai students got a "C" in that class in the first written examination.
- Bohlcke: Does that happen very often?
- Teepanont: No, this is my first time I got "C" from him.
- Bohlcke: What about your other teachers?
- Teepanont: Oh, I never got "C" from other teachers.
- Bohlcke: Do you always feel like you understand what the teacher wants?
- Teepanont: Yes, I always understand what they want. If I don't understand, I ask. But with Dr. Kingery this time...because of that question...I don't know how to ask him because the question is very general, and I just don't know how to answer it.
- Bohlcke: But you think this is not the way things usually are? You

think that teachers usually make themselves clear here?

Teepanont: Yes, they make themselves clear. Yes, I think that other Thai students think that the teachers are good here. They know how to teach.

Bohlcke: And do you think that the teachers at North Texas in general understand the difficulty that the foreign students have?

Teepanont: In higher education administration? As I told you before, they are more understanding from other departments. But I have heard from my friends.

Bohlcke: But you feel that some of the other places might not be so...

Teepanont: No, like the Department of Counseling?

Bohlcke: Yes.

Teepanont: It's very tough. I heard this from my Thai friends.

Bohlcke: Hard because of its faculty...

Teepanont: Yes, faculty.

Bohlcke: Not because of the subject?

Teepanont: No, not the subject.

Bohlcke: What would you say that you've learned from...not just the content, but what would you say you've learned from going to school in a different country?

Teepanont: Oh, I learn a lot. I learn to understand people--why they act that way or why they act this way. You know, I think I learn a lot.

Bohlcke: Was it very different to go to school in the Philippines?

Teepanont: No, it's not difficult for me to go to school in the Philippines

because the people are Oriental.

Bohlcke: Yes,

Teepanont: But I learn a lot, too, in the Philippines because I stay at the International Housing, and there are many, many foreigners in the International Housing, like, from Indonesia, Nepal, Iranian, American, lots of Americans, England, Nigeria, Afganistan. I saw so many people, and then every month we would have international food. Each country will cook food and put it in a special hall, and anybody just comes and tastes it. Then we have, like, a talent show every month. We also invite other people to come and see the show.

Bohlcke: And we don't do that sort of thing here.

Teepanont: No. Probably it's too big. And people are more busy here, but over there people don't work. They only go to school, so they have more time. But here many students study and work at the same time. They work in the cafeteria. They work somewhere else. They don't have time, but over there people just go to school, and they study only. They play one or two hours a week, and the rest of the time, they study and then enjoy life. Yes, it's very nice. I really liked it in the Philippines. I learned a lot from talking with them. It's lot of fun over there in the Philippines.

Bohlcke: It's not so much fun here?

Teepanont: No, I don't think so (chuckle). Oh, but you learn a lot,

are taught a lot, enjoy life. But here I don't think they enjoy life or something. I have to study hard, probably because of the Ph.D.

Bohlcke: Don't you think we could have some kind of social life like that, though, here even though you have to study?

Teepanont: I don't know. I think it's hard. Like I told you before, everybody is busy here.

Bohlcke: Do you have a job?

Teepanont: I work at the school cafeteria.

Bohlcke: And most everyone else has a job?

Teepanont: Yes, except the one who studies computer or business. They don't have time to work.

Bohlcke: Are you glad you came?

Teepanont: Yes, I'm glad I came. At least I changed my life (chuckle) from, you know, as I told you, from being boring. I get rid of my boring over there. I have learned a lot.

Bohlcke: Okay.