

Oral History Collection

Ms. Candice Bernd

Interviewer: Ms. Kelli Gill

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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Ms. Bernd: My name is Candice Bernd, and I am not just solely a journalist. I have been involved in the fracking movement in Denton since its inception, in 2009, is where I would trace it back to. And at that time I was a journalism student at UNT. I really got started in it because my partner at the time, his name is Andrew Teeter, he was running for City Council, as a City Council position, and he was kind of fielding positions and a platform. The campaign manager was Mike Sutton, who formerly owned Big Mike's Coffee, but he's Big Mike. Big Mike sort of understood the issues of the city at that time, and was advising Andrew a lot in his campaign, and pointed Andrew in the direction of fracking.
[Break].

Bernd: The first time Andrew and I both, together, met one of the women who are primary leaders of Frack-Free Denton and Denton Drilling Awareness Group, Cathy McMullen. Andrew lived in the same neighborhood, and so we got together with Cathy McMullen one day. It was over the well site at McKenna Park. That well site there kind of sparked the movement. That's where I would trace the ultimate origins of the entire movement to, because there had been gas drilling in Denton, but there hadn't really been resistance to it until the McKenna Park gas well. It was just the worst possible place you could put a gas well. It's like, I couldn't make up a place that would be as bad as McKenna Park. Because it's right across the street from a park. There's a hospital that's across the other street, there's a retirement home, and it's smack-dab in the middle of a residential neighborhood. Basically, we met up with her, and a couple other people from the neighborhood, and that's when we decided to go door to door. At that time, the entire thing was focused around that particular well site, and trying to sway the city council to reject what was called the "special use permit" for that well site. And so

that's really how it began, was just that neighborhood organizing around McKenna. And it kind of spread out through there and Denton Drilling Awareness Group got created a little later. But 2009, the McKenna Park gas well is where I would trace it to. And so that's how you had a park where children play and a flaring gas well right across the street. That's kind of how that happened. And then, you know, with the outcry that followed, they felt that they had to revise the drilling ordinance, so they put together this task force, which we also protested because there were three industry representatives out of five, so it was totally stacked by the industry. And the Kevin Roden [a City Councilman] also put together what he called a shadow task force, which was Denton Drilling Awareness Group. [Break].

Bernd: There was all sorts of things being said about how Denton was just acting like radical or had just kind of banned it because it was a student population, that like the college, the fact that it's a two and a half college town influenced the vote. None of that was true, and if you had known the context, if anybody had known the context about

how long the fight had gone on, then they would know that we had done everything we could to work with the industry. That it wasn't just we banned it, out of nowhere. [Break]

Bernd: --gone to any city council meeting ever, about fracking, what you would have seen is that always, a clear majority was speaking out against fracking in the kind of proximities we were seeing fracking happening. Every time, the only person who ever spoke in favor of fracking was like some industry dude. [Break]

Bernd: A lot of people who voted for the ban support oil and gas drilling. It's just they didn't want it so close, the urban encroachment. [Break].

Bernd: What's interesting about HB40, and what's come in the aftermath of the Denton fracking ban, is it reveals the kind of state that we're in, the crisis of democracy and the crisis of representative democracy and how it's been failing us for a really long time. [Break].

Bernd: Even conservatives are upset about this, even conservatives who really support the idea that we need to have fracking right now, because they stripped local control, which is something that

traditionally conservatives and Republicans have been in favor of. [Break].

Bernd: It's just the idea that we're not a democracy, and we haven't been a democracy for a really long time. That's why you have these mass movements happening, mass social movements like "Occupy" [Occupy Wall Street, 2011] like "Black Lives Matter" [formed after killings of young black men by police, 2015]. We are actually in a time of social upheaval and this is kind of what it looks like locally for us, but it does tie in to a much larger, systemic critique. [Break].

Bernd: There are a few people like myself that have been involved in this movement that do see the connection to bigger problems. The forces in the city and the powers in the state completely screwed these people over with what they were trying to do. That like, these people saw ahead of the curve and did this. And I think it'll be important in that sense. Some people in Texas were like "the oil and gas industry is the most entrenched and powerful, tried to do this." We don't see it that way now, but I think later we will. [Break].

Bernd: Tell the story about an industry who's backed a lot

of people into a corner by literally besieging communities with gas wells. There are communities that have had gas wells on three side of them. The thing that has made this movement effective is our ability to tell our story. If you look a Carol Lynn, the Frackettes, the satire [You tube video of song "Death of Democracy"]. The thing that Carol Lynn did with that group, singing the death of democracy, about HB40, just totally making fun. They bring in Christi Craddick [Commissioner on the Railroad Commission of Texas, the elected regulatory body over oil, natural gas, utilities and surface mining]. That has been the strongest instrument, is being able to tell that story.

[Break].

Bernd: I'm surprised I haven't mentioned this yet, which is kind of silly, but also, my partner and I are making a documentary about it. On all sides, the story is getting told. It's being told in every facet that it can be, and that's just powerful. I mean, it beats money.

[End of interview]

