

Dr. Bill Blackburn

*The
Kerr County Historical Commission
Presents*

An ORAL HISTORY

OF

Bill Blackburn

*Kerrville, Texas
2022*

Kerr County Historical Commission
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Dr. Bill Blackburn
Interviewer: Mary Elaine Jones
Date: April 20, 2022
Place: Tech Center
Tivy High School
Kerrville, Texas

Dr. Bill Blackburn grew up in San Angelo, Texas, with two older sisters. His family genealogy dates to the Revolutionary War. He was ordained a Christian minister in April 1972, and in that capacity not only served churches and hospitals as pastor and chaplain in rural Kentucky early in his career but also at age 30 years was appointed Family Life Consultant to the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention, serving over 500 churches in Texas. During that time, collaborating with his wife, Deana Mattingly Blackburn, he published several books on marriage and family life. From 1984 to 1999, he served as pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Kerrville, Texas, where he formed lasting friendships and provided leadership to many non-profit organizations. Following retirement, he accepted the position of President of Partners in Ministry, a community-based ministry serving children, youth, and the poor in Kerr County, holding that position for twelve years. He has exerted significant leadership and consulted with a host of churches and non-profit organizations in Kerrville and Kerr County including Habitat for Humanity, and served on numerous boards in the initial beginnings of their ministries serving the needs of women, children and families such as the Christian Assistance Ministry, the Christian Women's Job Corps, Christian Men's Job Corps, and the Doyle Community Center. He also served on the Salvation Army Advisory Board, Peterson Regional Medical Center Foundation Board, and the Kerrville State Hospital Advisory Board, and boards of numerous other community organizations. His service to the City of Kerrville included board membership on the Economic Development Foundation as well as the vice chair of the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (2050), an award-winning twenty-year plan. He has received numerous awards and recognition including the "Spirit of Texas Award" by the Kerr County Bar Association (2006), the "Citizen of the Year" award by the Kerrville Daily Times and the Kerrville Area Chamber of Commerce (2007), and the inaugural "Good Neighbor Award" by the Kerrville Daily Times Kerrville Kind initiative (2019). In 2018, Dr. Blackburn became Mayor Blackburn, serving two terms as Mayor of Kerrville.

*The Oral History Project is a part of the
Kerr County Historical Commission, a
volunteer organization.*

Kerr County Historical Commission

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Name: Bill Blackburn

Date of Birth: August 14, 1946

Place of Birth: Rotan, TX

Education: San Angelo High School
B.A., Baylor University, Waco, TX
M.Div., Southwestern Baptist Seminary,
Fort Worth, TX
PhD, Southern Baptist Seminary,
Louisville, Kentucky
Post-doctoral study,
Oxford University, Oxford, England

Father: William Spence Blackburn (1905-1973)
Mother: Lucile Hill Blackburn (1912-2013)

Siblings: Jane Thomas
Lois Floyd

Spouse: Deana Mattingly Blackburn

Children: Cara Key
Carter Blackburn

Grandchildren: Malachi Jonah Key
Magdalyn Key
Zachariah Key
Jeremiah Key
Matthias Key
Lucile Blackburn
Elizabeth Blackburn

An Oral History of

Dr. Bill Blackburn

Hello. My name is Mary Elaine Jones, and I am with the Oral History Project of the Kerr County Historical Commission. We are very privileged today to be visiting with Dr. Bill Blackburn in the studios of Tivy High School in the Kerrville Independent School District. Dr. Blackburn has agreed orally and in writing to share his personal history, as well as perspectives of Kerrville and Kerr County, and he is granting the audio and videotaped interview to the Oral History Project, which will be housed in the Butt- Holdsworth Memorial Library and the Logan Library of Schreiner University. He's also granting permission for the Oral History Project to upload the interview to the Portal to Texas History, which is housed at the University of North Texas Library in Denton, Texas. And there it will be digitized and preserved and available online for educators, the public and researchers. We are most grateful for this gift.

Bill: Sure.

Mary Elaine: To begin our discussion, I wonder if you could give us some of your background and start with your given name, where you were born and when, and who your parents are.

Bill: Yes, it's Bill Blackburn. I was born in Rotan, Texas, which is north of Sweetwater, on August 14, 1946, which was the first anniversary of V-J Day, by the way. My parents both grew up in Abilene. On my father's side, I know that they were from Scotland and Ireland. And then Ambrose Blackburn arrived in Virginia in the 1700s and participated in the Revolutionary War. He received some land south of Nashville, Tennessee, which eventually became a national park. There was not enough traffic so it's no longer there as a national park. My mother's family again seems to be from Scotland, from Ireland, and they came to Mississippi, Alabama, and then to Texas.

Mary Elaine: So, you have deep roots in the United States and in Texas—more West Texas.

Bill: Yes. And through Ancestry.com, I am clearly Western European with about 7% Swedish.

Mary Elaine: Do you have siblings?

Bill: Yes, I have two older sisters. My sister Jane and her husband live in El Paso. My other sister Lois and her husband live in Clinton, Tennessee.

Mary Elaine: So, everybody gets back to roots.

Bill: But I'll tell you, those two sisters were great examples. They were both very good in school, and we had a great relationship. We have a great relationship. So, I feel blessed by them.

Mary Elaine: Tell us about your spouse and how you met her.

Bill: Deana (Mattingly) grew up basically in Dallas and Wichita Falls, and her father was a pastor. She graduated from Wichita Falls High School and went to Baylor. And I went through 12 years of public school in San Angelo. And then a year of college at what was then a community college, and which is now Angelo State University. And then I got a scholarship to Baylor University, got a B.A. there, then a Master of Divinity at Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth, and then a PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. In 1982, I did post-doctoral research in biblical studies, medical ethics, and psychology at Oxford University in Oxford, England.

Mary Elaine: How does that work to get into Oxford for postdoctoral study? Do you apply?

Bill: You apply to one of the 41 colleges and private halls that make up the university. You apply to a specific college or hall. And then you are accepted as a post-doctoral student, also known as a visiting scholar. Then you can take courses in any one of the colleges or private halls within the university. You can take any seminar or course. I about ran myself to death my first two weeks of what was called Michaelmas term in the fall because I just I was like a kid in a candy store.

Mary Elaine: What a terrific experience that you've probably drawn on so many times.

Bill: Well, and our daughter, Cara, was eight years old and went to third grade in England. Our son Carter went to a preschool in the town where we were, south of Oxford. A lot of memories.

Mary Elaine: Which reminds me, tell us about your children and your grandchildren.

Bill: Our daughter, Cara, graduated from Tivy High School in 1992, went to Baylor University, graduated with an elementary education degree, taught elementary ed in the Waco area, and then she and her husband went to the Middle East in ministry and they were there 17 years--in the Middle East and in the West Bank and then in Jordan.

Mary Elaine: And you got to visit?

Bill: Yes, we got to go once a year. They have six children, two of them born in the U.S.; the other four were born overseas and then one that died and is buried here. Since 2016, they are in the Waco area. He works for a software developer, and she works at the church with the children's ministry.

Our son Carter grew up in Kerrville, graduated from Tivy High School in 1997. He went to Syracuse University, graduated with a degree in broadcast journalism and political science. Since he was nine years old, he said he was going to be a sportscaster. And so, he is. He was with CBS Sports then ESPN, then back to CBS. He has two little girls and they in Austin.

Mary Elaine: So, you have eight grandchildren? Aren't you blessed.

Bill: Eight grandchildren. Really is a blessing.

Mary Elaine: You know, I was looking at your resume and, of course, it's most impressive. One of the things that struck me is that you have been a Christian minister for 50 years. You are celebrating this milestone this month.

Bill: That is right.

Mary Elaine: I was wondering if you would be willing to share that vocation, how that came about, and then maybe a little about those early years because I know you ultimately ended up here in Kerrville, but I would like to know more about that.

Bill: We were in the First Baptist Church in San Angelo and my pastor; James B. Leavell is a person that was just very important for me. I admired him so much. And then across the street from us was a pastor of another Baptist Church. And so, by the time I was six, when people asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up, I would say I want to either be a racecar driver or a preacher.

Mary Elaine: That sounds like a six-year-old.

Bill: Right. And I have gotten to drive a NASCAR car at the Atlanta Motor Speedway, not in a race, but as a part of Richard Petty's Driving School and then drive a Formula One car with a top speed at 240 miles an hour.

Mary Elaine: You're joking. How old were you then?

Bill: Oh, then I was pastor at Trinity Baptist in Kerrville.

Mary Elaine: You did that at that speed?

Bill: But no, I didn't get to

Mary Elaine: What a dream come-true.

Bill: As I grew up in my Christian faith, I had a sense that the Lord was calling me into the ministry and then in junior high school, I thought, "I think it's architecture." And so, I was headed that direction. We had an architect who taught in our high school, so for two years, I had mechanical drawing and architectural design. I wanted to go to U.T. (University of Texas), but then had a renewed call to the ministry in March of my senior year and all the preachers I knew were Baptist preachers who went to Baylor. So, I thought, "OK, that's what I'm supposed to do as part of the call." As it turns out, I got to seminary and there were U.T. students there and Texas Tech students and everybody else. But anyway, Baylor was good, and that's where Deana and I met.

In terms of filling out some things in the early years, I pastored a rural church (Burk's Branch Baptist Church, Shelby County) in Kentucky when I was doing my Ph.D. work in Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville. And it was a great experience. That church was founded in 1801 when Thomas Jefferson was president. And across the way, there was a Holstein farm. Across the way, you could see this falling down brick residence that was later restored. A beautiful two-story brick or actually two and a half story brick building.

That was the home of Isaac Shelby, the first American ambassador to the U.S. So, it was very historic.

A quarter mile down the road from us was Colonel Sanders. That's where he had retired. And Colonel Sanders would say he became a Christian when he was 78. He would say that everything got converted but his language when he got mad and he said, "If somebody could cure me of my cussing, my fortune would be theirs." Well, we moved back to Texas before I could cure him.

Mary Elaine: Do you know if he ever got cured?

Bill: I don't think he did. There was a very nice restaurant in Shelbyville, Kentucky, called the Colonel's Lady, named for his wife. But if he would get mad, he would have a walking stick and he would chase that cook through the kitchen. He needed to be converted.

So that was in early 1970 and the mid-seventies. And then in 1977, I was hired as the Family Life Consultant for Baptist General Convention of Texas. So, at 30 years old, I had the assignment of helping the 5000 plus Texas Baptist churches develop ministries to couples, to parents, to singles and senior adults.

Mary Elaine: And that lasted a while?

Bill: Yes, a little more than seven years. Seven and a half years. But I was on the plane all the time and we had two little kids. I also knew that eventually I would be back in the pastorate. So, in 1984, June of '84, I came to Kerrville as pastor of Trinity Baptist Church.

Mary Elaine: Tell us some more because that's sort of your start in Kerrville, right? With Trinity Baptist? Tell us about that experience and what you learned and the challenges as well.

Bill: Well, my history with Kerrville goes back to the fifties. My father worked for the Southern Equipment Company out of San Antonio. He called on local contractors in West Texas and Eastern New Mexico, and we would come from San Angelo with my dad on his business trips through Kerrville. And I remember seeing for the first time the Lions Camp and sometimes we would visit our Fiedler cousins in Fredericksburg.

Then my father ended up with Alzheimer's. And in that time, Kerrville State Hospital was an excellent place for geriatric patients with what's called organic brain syndrome. And so, Mother was working as a school secretary in the San Angelo schools central office. She had to do that job and she could not care for him in the way she wanted to. In 1969 he became a patient at the Kerrville State Hospital for exactly four years until his death in 1973. Mother and I would come from San Angelo, eat at Del Norte Restaurant, go see Daddy at the State Hospital, and head back. Let me say Luther Ross, the Superintendent at the time and his staff did a great job.

Then later, after I was pastor at Trinity Baptist Church, I was able to be a part of a group that fought to keep Kerrville State Hospital open because the state was looking to close it. And part of that was out of my deep appreciation.

You know, in the pastorate, the three main responsibilities of a pastor are preaching and teaching leadership and administration and pastoral care and all of those are big. And you also find a lot of expectations of the pastor and, you know, a lot is expected. I found it to be challenging but rewarding in so many ways. And you know, I have been away from that since 1999.

I was there 15 years—from 1984 to 1999 but I will never have a harder job. People said, “Is being mayor harder than being pastor?” I think being a pastor is harder, but you know, again, I look back at what we were able to accomplish, and the church almost tripled in size during that time, and we have close, close friends to this day from those days.

But the difficulty, Mary Elaine, is this. If you are a pastor and you stay in the town, you have to be careful because you cannot keep pastoring that church and you cannot get in the way of the new pastor. One of my very best friends from here was Michael Boulette, who was a priest at Notre Dame Catholic Church and now is a bishop. He told me when I stepped down as Pastor at Trinity Baptist: “I don't see how you can stay in the same town.” But then, he did when I was a part of getting the Catholic Retreat Center started out at Ingram (St. Peter Upon the Water). I think he handled that well.

Mary Elaine: He did, didn't he? That's very insightful though, that it's the difficulty and the challenge after you leave a post. Did you officially retire at that point?

Bill: When I stepped down as pastor, there was a project that several of us had been working on that needed a director. This Leadership Foundation, part of a national-international ministry, mainly focused on ministry to low-income persons. And so, we started what was called Partners in Ministry and I became the director.

Mary Elaine: So that was that transition. That is one thing I hoped you would talk about.

Bill: The focus of Partners in Ministry was on the needs of children, youth, and those in poverty. In Kerr County, everything we did was in collaboration with others. We worked with a variety of churches to get things done in the school district, city, and county. Our role was to bring people together to make a difference. And we did that in a whole variety of ways.

One of them was to have a big annual community service day we called CSI-- Community Service Infusion. We had as many as 800 volunteers working from one end of the county to the other, working on such things as beautification, taking care of the yards of older persons, doing some home fix-up, wheelchair ramps, all that kind of thing.

Mary Elaine: And in the process, identifying all sorts of need.

Bill: Yes.

Mary Elaine: And for them to know a resource. That was the sort of the vehicle it was?

Bill: Right. A resource because what we were trying to do was meeting resources with need, in lots of ways. I'll tell you a story about that that I've always liked. When we started, we had some money from the San Antonio Area Foundation to help other ministries and one of those we went to was the Salvation Army and said, "Can we work with you to start an after-school ministry and be their ministry?" We were going to buy the computers. We were going to have a staff to help. The Cailloux Foundation stepped in and said, "Let us buy the computers." There was a little boy. He was in the second grade and lived near the Salvation Army at that time. He was Hispanic and he was poor; he was living with his grandparents, both of whom were Spanish speaking only. We got word from the elementary school teacher that he needed help with language development. OK, so we've got software. We've got somebody as a teacher working with him and the other kids. The language development of that kid came up significantly. I think that can really have an impact on a kid because if he feels like in first or second grade, he's already behind, he can get discouraged. That's just one example.

Mary Elaine: During that period of time, just for information, you drew on the community's resources? It was not only the various faiths, right?

Bill: No, no. We worked with the school districts, and we worked with the city and county. And also, individuals who were funding us, as well as the Cailloux Foundation, the Stevens Foundation, the Peterson Foundation. And add to that, you know, individuals.

Mary Elaine: Beautiful idea.

Bill: It really is.

Mary Elaine: Is it still going?

Bill: Unfortunately, it's not. I stepped down in 2011 after I had been there 12 years. I had seen too many organizations that suffered from the Founder's Syndrome, where the founder stays too long. I stepped down. Within two years it was dead, unfortunately.

Mary Elaine: Has anything replaced it?

Bill: I've had some people talk to me about how we can resurrect the formula. Because one of the things we did was work to strengthen the organizations that we worked with, for example, consulting and helping connect them to funding. And I mean we had funders who would say, "What about we will give you this amount of money." I would say, "Wait a minute. We're doing well. Let me tell you somebody that's doing something important." Christian Women's Job Corps was the second project we really got started.

Mary Elaine: Now that one is still very vibrant.

Bill: We had a donor, who wanted to give \$5,000, and the Cailloux Foundation had just given us a big gift. And I said, "Hey. Computers, tables, equipment--why don't you give it to them, which they did.

Mary Elaine: It's really a little overwhelming to think about something that is beautiful going away, but it requires so much energy and a big commitment on the part of the community at-large.

I wanted to just go back to your wife, Deana because her work has paralleled this community-based work. Just say a little about her work and how you all worked together.

Bill: She was a high school teacher in English and history. And then she later got a master's in child development and family studies when we were in Dallas, at TWU (Texas Woman's University). In Kerrville, she was with the Hill Country Crisis Council for 17 years, responding to the needs of victims of sexual assault and domestic violence in a five-county area. And that is tough, tough work.

Mary Elaine: What role models you were for your children. They were immersed.

Bill: And then briefly she was in publishing and then she has been very involved in Christian Women's Job Corps and on the board and as a kind of teacher. So, for now, she's a consummate volunteer. Just received a new case today.

Mary Elaine: In thinking about your personal history, you have been not only a minister, but also, you've been a counselor, you've been a teacher, you've had academic appointments, and you are an author. Could you talk about how these roles came together or how they intermingled to be successful and to be able to disseminate what you know?

Bill: I think the first books were related to family and singles, and that's when I was a consultant for Texas Baptist General Convention and there's a natural tie.

Mary Elaine: So, what was the name of that work?

Bill: *You Two Are Important* by me and Deana about our own marriage. Then there's another one called *Stress Points and Marriage* and then I did *Understanding Your Feelings*, and then a book on suicide because I had a close college friend that committed suicide in 1980. Our Sunday School teacher was a publisher. He said, "I'd like for you to do a book about Pablo who committed suicide."

I said, "I'm too close to that, but I can do a book on the prevention of suicide" and so that's what I did. It was published in 1982, came out again in 1990 and it should be updated because it got a lot of attention. It has even been translated into Chinese. There were publishers that distributed the books.

The most recent one I did was self-published with Joe Herring Printing. It is called *The Effective Non-profit Organization* and I really haven't marketed it yet. I need to get on that.

Mary Elaine: Lessons learned right?

Bill: Well, I've been a part of non-profits since I was 17, a senior in high school in San Angelo. It was called Teens Against Polio, raising money for March of Dimes. So, when I was 17, I

was going to be in college there that year. I went on the board of the March of Dimes, and I've been related to non-profits since.

Mary Elaine: We'll anxiously await your marketing about this book. I have a feeling there might be a market for it. What about your teaching role?

Bill: I was able to teach at the Baylor Seminary and then at the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville. And then I was an adjunct field instructor for the Center for Studies on Aging in North Texas. And so, I had a graduate student that I was working with. And right now, I'm a field advisor for a doctoral student at Cambridge University. Now, here's the deal--that is Stockton Williams, who was the rector at Saint Peter's Episcopal Church here. I'm a field advisor on his doctorate work.

Mary Elaine: That is incredible.

Bill: One other connection there: In the seventies, when I did my Ph.D., it was on Daniel Day Williams, who was a theologian at the University of Chicago, and was at Union Seminary in New York. When Stockton came to Kerrville, we had breakfast and I said, "Now, where were you? Where were you raised?" And he said, "I was raised in Austin.

And I asked our friend Don Murdoch, who is director of Lady Lives, in Burleson, and he said, "Oh, yes. He is the son of the famous Mary Pearl Williams --that was his mother-- who was the first female district judge in Travis County. His father was Takashi for Law UT and later the Fifth Federal Circuit. So, Daniel Day Williams was Stockton's uncle.

And I had been in Stockton's home. We talked to his parents in Austin when I did my Ph.D., but I had not made the connection.

Mary Elaine: The connections are fascinating. Now this opportunity to be a mentor. Is it all online?

Bill: Mostly, though. No, he is in residential work now.

Mary Elaine: Oh, so now he's here.

Bill: And now he is here. I need to talk to him. He needs to budget enough for me to go to Cambridge.

Mary Elaine: I guess one of the things we ought to talk about is how in the world you got yourself into being Mayor of Kerrville.

Bill: Well, I'll tell you, I never intended to be mayor. It was not on my bucket list. It was not, you know, but in 2017, we had a lot of conflict and chaos on the city council. And the mayor and her husband were trying to run off the city manager and the city attorney. I thought there were five people on the council who were going to run for mayor.

To three of them, I said, "I'll support you; I will do whatever." "No, no, I would do whatever to support you," they said. All five backed out. And so, in early January 2018, I raised my hand and said, "I will run for mayor." Now here's an interesting factor. I'm a Democrat. This is, you know, an 80% Republican County.

But here's the thing. My biggest supporters and donors and campaign workers were Republicans. The mayor is a non-partisan position and they said, "Just get in there and do the job." I had people say to me, "You're the first Democrat I've ever donated to." And one person who was going to give me a nice big donation, said, "I may have to swallow hard, but I am a Texan."

If you look at my record of those four years from May of 2018 and I'll be out in less than a month, what you see is that it is just taking one step in front of the other to get stuff done. The values I've really focused on are integrity, treat people with respect, compassion, and productivity. And, we have gotten so much done.

But what a mayor does is always as a team--with the citizens, with the council, with the staff, with the community partners. The other thing I must say is that I've had two fantastic city managers. Good city managers can make a mayor and a council look good.

Mary Elaine: And vice versa.

Bill: Well, yes. You know, I don't think I've been an exciting or spectacular mayor. But again, we've got it done. And built relationships in the process. The other thing I'm saying about our productivity is that I inherited amazing community partners to work with: Corey Edmondson at Peterson Health, Mark Faust, KISD, Charlie McCormick at Schreiner; Mike Wittler at KPUB (Kerrville Public Utility). I'm going to leave someone out.

But, solid. And when you get community partners saying, "Let's work together to build a stronger, safer, better community," then you get results.

Mary Elaine: And it is long lasting. It is exactly what you were doing before, is it not? Building relationships.

Bill: And on a radio show this morning, the deejay was saying, "... 2050—that is a long time from now." because we're looking at the Kerrville Comprehensive Plan. But you know there's that saying, and I should quote it--- I hope I can quote it fairly accurately-- that "The meaning of life is planting trees under whose shade you're not going to sit." So, we got things done.

And then there's more that's going to happen because of that. And I'm 75, I'm not going to be around for all that time, but it's fulfilling.

Mary Elaine: If you had to say what you think your biggest accomplishment during this four-year period has been, what would you say?

Bill: I think part of the challenge honestly is that you always have folks who are going to criticize. We have a relatively small group of chronic critics. They are at almost every council meeting. I can probably predict what they are going to say. Also, say you have a zoning issue and because of the zoning, you have people that are concerned about what's coming in next to them? And their house will land up right behind a group of houses that has been an open field and now there can be residences there. They can be

upset and get mad. There are so many issues that we decide that some people are happy, some people are mad. I think for me, I say, look, most of our decisions, we have a citizens committee that has gone through this. The staff has gone through it. We have backup information. It may be financial engineering, whatever else. And we're making the best decision that we believe is right for the city.

Mary Elaine: You've gathered as much data as possible.

Bill: One of the challenges that I think sneaks up on us sometimes is racism. Nobody likes to think of racism in a community that we love, but it's there. But over my time here, since 1984, I have really worked to build better relationships and in all kinds of ways. And I know we have done that in these four years.

And another big thing for me is that both my parents grew up with not much—my mother in real poverty. Father did not have much. They were always concerned about the poor kids and so forth. And I think we have been a low wage town, especially for women for a long time.

OK, with the economic development under this council, we have worked to bring in two aviation companies that will eventually employ about 500 people, good pay and benefits. One of them is going to eventually have 400 employees. Now they have 32.

Mary Elaine: Makes a significant difference.

Bill: It's going to raise, you know, raise all of the boats in lots of ways. So that's something I look at.

Mary Elaine: Don't you think that most people don't realize the backstory of what is going on within the city infrastructure in order to come to conclusions such as recruiting companies? I think even though you can read about some of it in the newspaper, it feels as though maybe there are a significant number of people that remain uninformed.

Bill: It is hard to see. For instance, what I could show you today is a project list of 32 major projects the city is working on right now. And so, it gets complicated, and you can't explain all of that. But one of the things that I've tried to be is a communicator for the city. I'm on three radio stations after every council meeting. Every Wednesday, I'm on a radio station, and a lot of that is just explaining issues like streets and water and what we're doing here in parks, recreation and all those kinds of things.

Mary Elaine: There is dissemination; just some people may not know there is.

Bill: Dissemination, but you know, we've got a great website. It's a lot. And Facebook and other ways. The city is actually very transparent. It really is.

Mary Elaine: I think you were the right person at the right time. I remember you saying that you walked the neighborhoods and that you really engaged with ordinary citizens during your campaign. You probably are still doing that.

Bill: Well, I'll tell you, I've walked about 215 miles of the city and it has helped so much because if we have a zoning issue, I have walked that street. Met some folks and know what that's like. And so, it's not an abstract. The other thing I would say is that we try to get the agenda for Tuesday's council meeting out on Friday, and I try to visit every zoning site and just be able to look at it and see the issue. So again, that is important.

Mary Elaine: And people don't realize that all of that work is going on.

Bill: Yes, it takes a lot of time. But being a mayor is a combination of frustration and fulfillment, but it's been a lot more fulfillment than frustration.

Mary Elaine: Are you ready to start retirement?

Bill: I'm ready. I'm not stepping down because I am burned out or angry or any of that. It's just time.

Mary Elaine: You didn't say what was the most rewarding.

Bill: I'm going to say probably the most rewarding would be the economic development I'm seeing. The Economic Development Corporation I was on 30 years ago was called the Economic Development Foundation. Now it's Corporation and it is rewarding to see where it is today.

There is so much they are doing not just to attract businesses, but they're doing so much to retain and strengthen existing businesses. Now there is a business incubator that for four years I have fought for, where local people can get assistance in starting a business. People may have a good idea, but they need help developing that business plan, then funding it, and then getting started. That is now happening. It gives folks a leg up. And to me, a bit of quid pro. We are such an entrepreneurial community. If you look back at Charles Schreiner and the Butt Family and Al Mooney and Harry Dietert.

Mary Elaine: And James Avery.

Bill: Peterson Brothers and James Avery. They had that kind of entrepreneurial spirit we can see again, not that they're going to make some big, huge company. But if more people locally see other people starting businesses and they've gotten the help they need, they can have success.

We have such a resource and the people in this county that can help advise folks as they build a business.

But, you know, I will say this about this post as Mayor. I've been paid \$50 a month for three years. So now I'm looking for a paying job.

Mary Elaine: I don't blame you. I don't know if they can afford you with all the time you put in and the knowledge base that you bring. What would you say about Kerrville?

Bill: I find the history fascinating. I love to read Joe Herring's columns and other people that have written about the history. I love people's stories. For two years, I did feature

articles for The Daily Times on different people here and their background and stories and everything else, and I love it. I just find it fascinating. And I was careful, by the way, that it was not just Anglo. I was interviewing Hispanic and Black individuals as well. I love this community. I don't think a lot of people understand what a jewel this community is. I mean it has so much. For instance, if you look at the schools in this county. Right now, I'm thinking mainly of the public schools, but that includes private as well. What they are doing, the effort of teachers and administrators and the opportunities coming out of these schools that these students have now.

Part of that excitement for me is economic development. Killdeer Mountain Manufacturing is hiring people at \$16 to \$22 an hour with full benefits and that includes folks who have a high school diploma. They don't have to have college there. So, it makes a difference if you get that kind of thing that really attracts more of your local kids who are not headed to college. But I love it. It was good for our two kids.

Mary Elaine: And you've seen change.

Bill: Oh, I've seen change. I've seen a lot of good changes. And, you know, the struggle now is that we're going to grow more than we have. The city, through the comprehensive plan, looked at managed growth that will keep our uniqueness as Kerrville and our small-town feel. That isn't going to be easy. But Kerrville is on the map. Lots of folks know about Kerrville.

And so that's going to be good. And some of this can be difficult. We moved here in 1984. There is a woman we met at Schreiner Bank when they had a thing for newcomers. And she came here from Houston. Lived out by Hunt. She absolutely wanted to close the gate. She did not want anybody else to come in here, including from Houston.

The reason I like the work of Joe Herring and others is that it gives you more of a sense of roots and of people that didn't grow up here. I didn't grow up here.

Mary Elaine: It is fascinating. It really is. And it represents Texas in so many ways.

Bill: We represent Texas in one way that if you look at those who settled here, there were Mexicans here who were part of Mexico. They're still here. You had several Native American tribes represented within the people. Then the Anglos came who were kind of polyglot because it was English, French, Scottish.

Mary Elaine: German.

Bill: You know, it was more of a mix than in some of the German towns.

Mary Elaine: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about?

Bill: I was trying to look over some notes I had here, and I think we really have covered it.

Mary Elaine: I would like you to end by talking about the guiding principle that has governed your life.

Bill: Well, again, I would go back to what I tried to implement as mayor and working with the council and city and city staff: integrity. My number one issue in leadership is integrity because if you can't trust somebody, how are you going to follow them? My main mentor in organizational development was an Austrian named Peter Drucker, who lived in the US from 1937 on. Some call him the father of modern management. Fascinating. And I got to know him because I went to his non-profit management summits in the nineties and then got to be with him at the occasion of his 91st birthday. Anyway, Drucker is so strong on integrity. And I do want to tell you one other quote that is interesting to me, but integrity, respect for the individual.

I had a great conversation this morning with our custodian at City Hall. Just very interesting, but I mean treating people with respect and then compassion. How do you exhibit compassion through your work? You know, in a variety of ways. And then the other is productivity. You know, you can have integrity and treat people with respect and have compassion and that's fine. But you need a product—productivity-- if you are in leadership.

Peter Drucker said something I've often quoted. He said, "We can't predict the future. We can look outside the window at the future of present events." We can't tell you the future, but just look outside the window at what is happening and where is it going? And that's one of the things we try to do with the City's 2050 (our city's Comprehensive Plan).

We had a 100-year projection of water resources study by four people--three engineers and a lawyer familiar with management and you think a hundred years? But what you do is look at what you have. What's your growth potential and how do you plan for that?

Mary Elaine: It's a lovely way to end this discussion and I appreciate it very much and thank you on behalf of the Kerr County Historical Commission. Thank you for the gift that you are giving to us.

Bill: Good. Thank you very much. Enjoyed it.

Dr. Bill Blackburn



William Spence Blackburn (1905-1973)

Kerrville, Texas
2022

Dr. Bill Blackburn



Lucile Hill Blackburn (1912-2013)

Kerrville, Texas
2022

Dr. Bill Blackburn



Bill and Deana Blackburn

Kerrville, Texas
2022

Dr. Bill Blackburn



Carter and Cara Blackburn



**Cara Blackburn Key, Carter Blackburn, Lucile Hill Blackburn (age 95)
at Carter Blackburn's Wedding 2007**



Mayor Bill Blackburn, City of Kerrville 2018-2022