

Interview of Matt Alderson

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Place: Farmers Branch, TX



Project: Frognot Water Supply Corporation History



Subject: Painting the Frogs on the Water Tanks in Year 2000

Interviewer: Lydia M.V. Brandt

Transcribed by: Margaret Forestal

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I. Introductions and Photograph Descriptions

Brandt: My name is Lydia Brandt. I'm a member of the Board of Directors of Frognot Water Supply Corporation. Today is March 26, 2011. It's a Saturday, and I'm interviewing Matt Alderson, who painted the frogs on the Frognot Water supply tanks. This interview is taking place at his home. The interview is sponsored by Frognot Water Supply Company as part of the Frognot Water Supply Company's history project. So let me first ask Matt if he would introduce himself.

Alderson I am Matt Alderson. I painted the frog on the front of the water tower.

Brandt: Could you just give me the year you were born. I don't want to get a lot of sensitive information, but just so we get some sort of time frame.

Alderson: I was born in 1985.

Brandt: Were you born and raised in the Blue Ridge area?

Alderson: I was born in McKinney, but we were raised in Blue Ridge all of my life.

Brandt: So about what time or what time period did you move to Blue Ridge?

Alderson: I have lived there all my life. My parents moved there, I think, maybe five or so years before I was born. So they've been there.

II. Schools

Brandt: Did you go to the Blue Ridge schools?

Alderson: Yes. I went there for all grades.

Brandt: What schools did you attend? You said Blue Ridge Grammar School?

[extensive pause to adjust equipment]

Alderson: Yeah. I went to Blue Ridge ISD K through 12.

Brandt: And you graduated from Blue Ridge?

Alderson: Yes.

III. Signed Agreement

Brandt: I have got a copy of the agreement. I just wanted to know that you are signing it, and you are consenting to the contents of it, allowing Frognot to use the interview of the oral history you are providing and also copies of the documents that you have given me, and the photographs. Is that correct?

Alderson: Yes. [pause to sign the agreement]

Brandt: Okay. We've got it all signed. I'll give you a signed copy with my signature on it so that you'll have a copy of it. Did you have a chance to look at the questions? Let me ask you, generally, how you got involved in painting the signs on the Frognot Water Company?

IV. How Matt Got Involved in Painting Frogs

Alderson: Okay. There was a lady by the name of Lamarteen Barnett. She, I think, was born and raised in Frognot and lived there all of her life. She went to our church. She was either on the Board or, somehow, she was involved with it. She came to me with the idea and asked me if I would draw a few frogs, like samples, because they were interested in possibly me painting them on the first tower, the shorter one. So she asked if I would do that, and then she was just going to take it to the Board and bring the idea to them and see what they thought.

Brandt: Was she a member of the Board of Directors?

Alderson: I think she was, but I'm not 100% certain. I asked my mom, and she thought she was too, but she wasn't sure.

Brandt: Could you spell her name for me?

Alderson: L A M A R T E E N.

Brandt: That's her last name?

Alderson: No, that's her first name.

Brandt: What is her last name?

Alderson: Barnett.

Brandt: I think one of her relatives was on the Board, Neil Barnett?

Alderson: Yes, could be, maybe her son. [Inserted after interview: Lamarteen Barnett was the mother of Neil Barnett. Neil was on the Board of Directors for Frognot WSC for the years 2001 to and including 2006. Mrs. Barnett never served on the board of directors.]

Brandt: We'll check out that connection. About what time period was this, what year? Do you remember?

Alderson: I think I did it in 2000.

Brandt: That you made the drawings for her?

Alderson: Yeah.

Brandt: And how did they know about your drawings?

Alderson: Since we're just kind of a small town, a lot of people had known that I could draw because I had done a few things for other people. I think I had even drawn a drawing of our church for our church bulletins.

Brandt: What church is this?

V. Drawing Samples

Alderson: First United Methodist. So I think she kind of knew, and she was close to my mom, so she knew I could draw. So she came to me with the idea, and asked if I would draw some samples. She told me kind of what they wanted, like the frog, and then what they wanted it to say. So I actually drew several. This is the only one I still have. This was the one they picked. Do you want me to hold it up?

Brandt: No, let me see if I can take a picture of it.

Alderson: But I know that I drew quite a few.

Brandt: This was the first picture that you drew?

Alderson: I don't know if this was the first one, but I drew several. I don't remember how many.

Brandt: Is this the one that she said she wanted to take to the Board?

Alderson: I think she wanted to take all of them to Board for review, and I think they may have voted. This was the one they chose.

Brandt: You've got a couple of other pictures here for me. There's one. Could you describe this for me please?

VI. Grandfather and His Hats

Alderson: Yeah. That was the day that my grandfather had come down, and he let me borrow one of his hats. He was always famous for wearing those straw hats, and wanted me to borrow it. It would look cool up there, he said, and keep the sun off. So this is a picture of me wearing that while I was up there painting.

Brandt: And that was his hat?

Alderson: Yeah, it was his hat.

Brandt: So it's kind of a memento in memory of him? And how about this other one where you're standing underneath the water tower?

Alderson: I believe that was when I completely finished it, and so they were just taking the final shot of me next to it.

Brandt: Who took that picture of you?

Alderson: Probably, my mom or my dad. I know there were several others. There's

one with me and my little nephew next to me. And then there's one with Lamarteen. I tried to find that one, but I wasn't able to.

Brandt: And you said I could take these with me, right?

Alderson: Yeah. I made those copies for you.

VII. Newspaper Article

Brandt: Tell me about this newspaper article.

Alderson: I don't remember a lot about that. I remembered that we had the photo. It's like someone had come down from the McKinney Courier Gazette. And the people had asked me. They took several photos, and they called to let me know when it was going to be in the newspaper.

Brandt: So this was taken the same time that you were doing the painting?

Alderson: Yeah. It came out...

Brandt: This was dated June 2, 2000.

Alderson: Yeah, I was 14 at the time.

VIII. Getting Proportions Right

Brandt: Tell me how you were able to do the proportions on here, because that's pretty daunting, going from a small picture, probably no more than 4 inches x 6 inches, to these huge water towers. What was the process to get the frog on there? Did you start out by doing pencil drawings or what?

XI. Process Used

Alderson: Actually I didn't have much of a process. This was one of my first major thing. I think I had done the gym floor at my school. The gymnasium, it had a tiger on that. So that was my first thing that I had done.

Brandt: That was very large in scale?

Alderson: Yeah. I may have learned a little bit from that. As far as I can tell, I've always been pretty good at drawing to scale. So my dad just set up scaffolding, and I climbed up and just started drawing it out. Then I would climb back down and stand back and look at it, because it was a pretty thick pencil. My dad used it for something in his workshop, so I could see it once I got down to make sure the proportion was right. They told me how big they wanted it, so I think I kind of drew lines at the very top of it and the very bottom to kind of help me judge how big it needed it to be.

Brandt: Do you recall what the dimensions were that they had asked you?

Alderson: I don't recall that.

Brandt: So you used some kind of a drawing pencil initially, and you penciled everything in first?

Alderson: Yeah, I penciled everything in first and got it to how I wanted it. Then I started to paint.

X. Paints

Brandt: What kind of paint did you use?

Alderson: I don't remember, but we went to Sherwin-Williams for most of my painting projects. And we would go and tell them what my project was, and they would help us figure out...there was always this older man there, and he was always really nice. He would have us bring in photos of what I was doing to show him.

Brandt: At Sherwin-Williams?

Alderson: Yeah. The one in McKinney, I think. He probably told us what type to buy. We told him it was going to be on a water tower...that type of information.

Brandt: That it had to last quite a while?

Alderson: Yeah. So he was pretty helpful in helping us choose the right kind. I chose the colors, but that's how we did that.

XI. Helpers

Brandt: Did you have any helpers while you were painting?

Alnderson: Really, the only one who helped me was my dad. Other people came and just sat there with me so I had company while I was there. If I needed their opinion on something, I would ask them. It was mainly my dad. He set up the scaffolding. I was also scared of heights, so I was terrified of the scaffolding even though it wasn't that tall. So I would stay off of it, and he would carry all the paints for me and set them up there. Then he would have to be completely off of it. Then, I would climb up there because, when he

was up there, it would start shaking, and I was terrified it was going to fall over.

XII. Safety

Brandt: Did you tether yourself to anything in case you fell while you were reaching over? Because this picture in the article [Exhibit D: Picture of Matt in the McKinney Courier-Gazette] looks like you're just standing there. So you could have fallen to the left or to the right, right? You didn't have any kind of harness?

Alderson: No, I didn't. I'm a pretty cautious person, and I was scared of heights, so I knew I wasn't going to do anything crazy. So once I was up there, I was pretty still. The scaffolding felt pretty sturdy.

Brandt: And you had someone there with you all the time? It may have been your dad or someone else, just in case something happened?

Alderson: Most of the time it was my dad. My grandfather came that one day and sat with me and let me borrow his hat. I believe my mom was out there for a bit.

XIII. Length of Time

Brandt: How long did it take you to paint the shorter tower [Exhibit F: Well #1 located at County Road 981 in Collin County, TX]?

Alderson: I think I did that in a weekend.

Brandt: So two days?

Alderson: Yeah.

Brandt: How about the other tower, the tall stand pipe [Exhibit H: Well #2 located at County Road 78 in Collin County, TX]?

Alderson: I think that may have taken three days because it was a little taller. It didn't go up much taller, I think it was something to do with that. It took me three days instead of two.

Brandt: You completed one first [Well #1 at CR 981], and then you did the other [Well #2 at CR 78]?

Alderson: I completed that one. Then I think they came to me after about the second one and asked if I would do it as well.

Brandt: How long in between did it take? Did months or weeks pass between?

Alderson: Probably months. I'm not entirely sure on that one. I don't remember a whole lot about the second one. I kind of have a bad memory.

Brandt: Did you want to tell us about the bad memory?

Alderson: I have trouble recalling things.

Brandt: Oh, you have a bad memory, not that you have bad memories about this.

Alderson: No, I have good memories of all that, from what I can remember.

XIV. Payment

Brandt: Was this a volunteer effort or did you get paid?

Alderson: They did pay me.

Brandt: Do you remember how much?

Alderson: I don't remember much. I was always bad at that part when I had to paint stuff for people, I just kind of had to tell them whatever you think it's worth. That's kind of how I would always do it, but I don't remember.

XV. Design

Brandt: Where did you get the design for the frogs? Is it something you made out of your head, or were you looking at pictures of amphibians?

Alderson: No, it was just something out of my head. I always kind of doodled, so drawing a little frog was pretty easy for me.

Brandt: The frogs are different on each of the different tanks. Was that deliberate?

Alderson: Probably not. They look different?

Brandt: Yeah, there's two different frogs. This is the frog on Well Number One. And this is the frog on the taller one [Well #2 at CR 78] that Frognot has now used as its logo [Exhibit I: Frognot WSC Logo]. You can see it's facing in a different direction.

Alderson: Yeah, I don't think that was intentional. I probably just started painting and didn't realize it.

Brandt: So this could have come from one of the several designs that you had provided them?

Alderson: Yes.

Brandt: So this could have been a different design than you had previously given them?

Alderson: Probably. I don't remember much about that one. It's either possible, or I just used the photo of it and didn't realize I was doing the wrong direction.

Brandt: How long did the second tank take?

Alderson: I think that was three days.

Brandt: So it was a total of five days then. When did you do this? I see this article is dated June 2nd, so this must have been in the heat of the Texas summer?

Alderson: Yeah, that's why he was giving me his hat. He was worried I was going to get too hot up there. He thought that made a little bit of a difference. I don't remember it being too bad. Up there, it was kind of breezy.

XVI. Mary Hall's Frog

Brandt: Do you know anything about Mary Hall and the first frog?

Alderson: I don't. I asked my mom if she would ask the lady I told you about, and she said that her mom would probably know about it because she worked at the store, and she knew a lot of people in Frognot, and if they had any photos, they might have had them in the store. I don't know. I don't know anything about it. I think Lamarteen may have told me. I knew that there was one on there before. That it faded off, and they painted over it. But they didn't really say much what it looked like. I'd like to see what it looked like.

Brandt: It sounds like it was a pretty controversial frog. [Exhibits J1 and J2: Tolbert's Texas - two newspaper articles on the painting by Mary Hall]

Alderson: Was it?

Brandt: Yes. There were some people who were not as happy with the [original painted] frog [by Mary Hall] as it could be, but your frogs seemed to pass muster with everybody. They like your frogs. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about in the Frognot painting?

Alderson: Not that I can think of.

XVII. Matt's Current Job

Brandt: Are you a painter now? Are you in fine arts?

Alderson: No, I went to college, and I minored in art, but as much as I like it, it stresses me out when I do it for other people. So I've always kind of kept it as a hobby. I still paint from time to time, and occasionally, someone will call me up or get my number somehow, and ask if I will paint something for them. I've done a few murals in kids' rooms and small – just little – painting that someone will ask me to do. But, other than that, I actually work in downtown Dallas at a non-qualified deferred compensation company.

Brandt: So it has nothing to do with art?

Alderson: Yeah. I went to college for it, but I decided I would rather have money, so I switched.

Brandt: So anything else you would like to tell us?

Alderson: Not that I can think of. I guess I was 14 at the time. I don't remember a lot about it. I spoke to my parents when I left their place last weekend. We

were celebrating everyone's birthdays.

Brandt: How old are you now?

Alderson: 25. They were trying to fill me in on some of the stuff I was a little fuzzy about. They couldn't remember much more about it either. She was able to help me to remember that it was Lamarteen Barnett that was the one that kind of got everything together.

Brandt: Do you have a picture of your grandfather that we could add since we've got his hat?

Alderson: Yeah, I have one of my grandparents. And I also know the Todd's as well. I was friends with John Daniel growing up. My brother and my sister were friends with Michael and Matthew [Todd]. We all kind of knew each other. So that was also probably another reason I was able to paint the frogs. They came out to visit me while I was there and check on me.

Brandt: Robert Todd was the manager of Frognot at the time, right?

Alderson: Yes.

Brandt: Would it be all right if we put this on Internet or include it in the book?

Alderson: Yeah, it's perfectly fine.

Brandt: Anything else you would like to tell us?

Alderson: Not that I can think of.

Brandt: Thank you so much. I appreciate the time.

XVIII. Exhibits

Exhibit A: Matt Painting Frogs Wearing His Grandfather's Hat



Exhibit B: Matt's Original Frog Drawing



Exhibit C: McKinney Courier Gazette Front Page dated June 2, 2000



Exhibit D: Picture of Matt in McKinney Courier-Gazette



Exhibit E: Matt's Grandfather



Exhibit F: Picture of Matt After Completing the Painting



Exhibit G: Lamarteen Barnett



Exhibit H: Well # 2 located at CR 78 painted by Matt



Exhibit I: Frognot WSC Logo



Exhibit J1: Frank Tobert, *Frognot Town Gets Huge Frog Painting*, Dallas Morning News, p. 1 (Nov. 19, 1966)

Stopped at the big tank of the new Frognot municipal water system. On one side of the tank is the bright green, man-sized portrait of a frog sitting on a toadstool or a mushroom.

The frog was painted as a public service to Frognot by Mrs. Mary Hall of Garland. Mrs. Hall is an excellent artist but she has chosen to portray a frog of rather unconventional appearance.

"WE LIKE Mrs. Hall's frog painting because it's different," said Ira Richmond Boren of Frognot. "The frog on that tank looks like a cross between a tree frog, a leopard frog, and a lizard. It's a frog with a lot of life. Mrs. Hall said she drew a lively frog because Frognot is a lively community. We also want to mention Mrs. Hall's bravery in getting up on a scaffold to paint that frog."

MAYOR AND MRS. Otis Dixon of Frognot told me about a month ago that the engineers who put in the new water system were going to draw a gigantic picture of a frog on the tank, if they got the time. Apparently, the engineers didn't get around to it. So Mrs. Hall volunteered.



Tolbert's Texas

Noisy Geese Formations Cause Stir in Frognot

By FRANK X. TOLBERT

WANDERING around in the northern reaches of this province last week when the cool, wet front came in was a good time for bird-watching. In Monday's column there was mention of the clouds of sea-gulls following the peanut harvesting machinery on farms near the Red River. There were massive flights, too, of geese.

The most geese in one sky I observed last week came over the City of



Frognot or Frog Not, between Blue Ridge and Pike in Collin County.

These were in two formations. V-shaped, of course. The geese don't seem to go in for the T-formation or for the Wishbone. There must have been thousands of birds in the two V-formations.



FROG PAINTING ON FROGNOT TANK

And although they were rather high over Frognot they were making high-volume, wild sound effects, some of the primal music which seems to orchestrate meteorological changes.

The municipal label of Frognot (originally Frog Not) derived from an early-day school with a principal who refused to permit students to bring pet frogs to classes.

Frognot is in nest of creeks and



branch streams and there's no scarcity of the web-footed amphibians in these reaches of Collin County.

There's a painting of a green and

yellow frog, a rather lean-looking creature, on the tank of the Frognot Water Supply Corporation, and I've been trying for some time to interest a sculptor in doing a frog for the Frognot town square.

DESERT, on Desert Creek, is another hamlet in Collin County which acquired its name in a rather unique manner. Up until the recent rains it has been rather dry around Desert, but never has this been desert type terrain.

The story I've heard is that Desert Creek was named because it was once the site of a prison camp for deserters from the Confederate army. (Another relic of troubled times in the 1861-65 war is Prison Canyon, near the old headquarters for the 1850's camel experiment of the U.S. Army, the village of Val Verde, Kerr County. This was a prison for Union sympathizers during the Civil War, most of them German descent settlers in the Hill Country, or so I was told in Val Verde town.)

HONDO CROUCH complains that in my Sunday column I failed to mention some of the big "improvements" made in his town, Luckenbach, Gillespie County, as the primitive village gets ready for the annual for-women-only state chilli cookoff, sponsored by the Hell Hath No Fury Chilli Society. (The date for women's lib type cookoff is next Saturday.)

"You didn't mention the new bridge across Snake Creek right here in the city limits," said the aggrieved mayor of Luckenbach.

In truth the bridge over Snake Creek hardly looks worth mentioning. It's only a couple of telephone poles laid across the stream.

"Also you ignored the new recreation facilities for children here in Luckenbach," said Mr. Crouch, indicating an old auto tire tied by a rope to the limb of a live oak. "You'll note it's a white sidewall tire. We go first class in Luckenbach," said Mr. Crouch.

Hondo Crouch and Gulch Kooch purchased the entire township of Luckenbach several years ago, and they run the place in rather dictatorial fashion except on the day of the annual Hell Hath No Fury cookoff.

I'M NOT usually partial to Delicious apples, since the ones in the supermarkets are too bland for my taste. Yet some of the most delicious Delicious I've sampled in a long time are those raised in Montague County, Texas, especially those on the Gerald Whitecotton orchards. Mr. Whitecotton's trees are averaging 3 bushels to each young tree.

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