

## TRANSCRIPT

**SCRC Series:** Lewis Clarke Oral Histories Project – MC 00191

**Field Notes:** Donald E. Basile (compiled October 20, 2011)

**Interviewee:** DONALD E. (“DON”) BASILE

**Interviewer:** Yona R. Owens

**Interview date:** Thursday, July 14, 2011

**Location:** Douglassville, Pennsylvania

**Length:** Approximately 130 minutes

This interview for the Lewis Clarke Oral Histories Project was conducted at Don Basile’s kitchen table. He was asked about his years as a North Carolina State University School (now College) of Design student (Class of ’67), his work on Palmetto Dunes and other projects while employed by Lewis Clarke Associates (late 1960s), and his unusual decision, as a landscape architect in the early ’70s, to start a development company with his brothers. He discusses Clarke’s “book of common knowledge,” the regulatory challenges his company has faced and overcome, and the Basile Corporation projects he is most proud of.

YO: Today is Thursday, July 14, 2011. My name is Yona Owens and I’m interviewing Don Basile in Douglassville, Pennsylvania. To start us off, tell me a little bit about where you’re from and how you got interested in landscape architecture.

DB: Well, when I was in high school, junior high school/high school, I would be cutting grass at my family’s house and I’d make sure it was cut beautifully, cut it two directions and all that kind of stuff, and I liked working with plants. So sometime in my early, maybe tenth grade, I decided I think I’d like to be a landscape architect. I didn’t really know what that meant. I thought it really meant just taking shrubs and putting them around houses.

So when I graduated from high school, I applied to both State and Cornell. Now we lived in Larchmont, New York, just outside New York City, in Westchester County. I got accepted at both schools, so I’m saying, North Carolina State, Cornell. I went to Cornell because Cornell’s an Ivy League school, the whole bit. But unknown to me the year before I went up, they lost their accreditation for landscape architecture. So, when I got up there the—what was it—the student counselor said he wanted to see me and he said I want you to know that I noticed that you want to be a landscape architect. We no longer have that program here, and I was like, you got to be kidding me? And so, I spent two years there in ornamental horticulture and was not a happy camper.

So at the end of that two-year period, I reapplied to State and I think it was the Rhode Island School of Design and I got accepted again at both. This time I decided to go down to State. When I got down to State, I then found out that their program was one of those things where there was a five-year program. You’ve got to go five years. So again, I was a little distraught that I was now going to go an additional five years of school for a guy who was twenty-two years old, and I wasn’t a real great student.

So, I’m in school and the first class I have is with Bireline, and we walk into class and there’s twenty of us, and this guy doesn’t say a thing. Doesn’t say a damn word. We’re all looking around. [Laughs] He’s the teacher. When is he going to say something, okay?

YO: [Laughs]

DB: He must have sat there for five minutes, maybe longer, didn't say a word. Then finally, I forget what he said, but it was the most weird thing that I'd experienced—I'd been to two years of school. You walk into class, the professor starts talking, and you start taking notes and all that kind of stuff, and this guy just sitting there looking around. Did he—No. He had a cup of coffee. He always had a cup of coffee with him. So, you know, it was just very, very strange, and I'm thinking to myself when I left there, I said, oh, what have I gotten myself into?

Now, as I said, I wasn't a real good student. So, the first few years I struggled at State. I just got by, and when I mean just got by I just got by. I can remember in third year my grades came in and I was close to flunking out, and I thought to myself, my God. First, how am I going to tell my parents? Two, forget how I'm going to tell my parents. This is what you want to do. What are you going to do if you don't do this? If you don't get a degree in this, what are you going to do? And so, I started buckling down, and by the time I graduated in my fifth year, I was on dean's list.

YO: All right. [Laughs]

DB: But it was very interesting. I don't really remember much about my first three years of school down there. It was like drudgery. It wasn't until the fourth and fifth year that it started to make sense. When I look back on it, this was a program where they took people into the program and you came in with preconceived ideas and they systematically destroyed every preconceived idea you had.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: They wanted you to start thinking in different terms.

YO: Right.

DB: And, you know, I don't know whether they did it—the objective was everybody that comes into the school, break them down. Whatever ideas they have, just wipe them out. You've got to get a clean—[Sound of barking dogs, break in recording]

**05:08**

YO: Okay, you were saying that they break you down.

DB: Yeah, at least that was my take on what was really happening. They would teach—I'm sure I was being taught stuff as I was going through those first three years, but I don't really remember much about those, other than getting up and going to class. I was in—I forget what—Fourth Form? I think it was called Fourth Dorm. It was the dorm right next to the school of design. It was the oldest dorm on school, maybe there were twenty rooms in the place, and I could look out my window and look right down at the School of Design. There were times—we had a freehand drawing class, I forget what the heck it was named now, and it was like at 8:00 in the morning.

YO: Oh no. [Laughs]

DB: I'd look over and I'd say to myself, gee, I'm not going to that class today. And of course I'd be looking over, okay, and I could see some of my classmates in class and I'd be laying in the bed saying, you know, and again I wasn't very good at freehand drawing so it wasn't one of those classes I really wanted to go to. So, that was the kind of thing that was going on in those first few years. I remember in one class we had to build some structure. So, I built this structure and you had to do it by a scale model and you had to get it to the right scale and everything else. You had to cut the pieces of wood to put the flooring down and all that kind of stuff.

YO: Right.

DB: And you did that and you had to get the little nails and put the... you know. I had built this thing, okay? It was like a brick shithouse.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: Whatever I built, okay, was square, rectangular, or whatever it was. You couldn't break it. We threw it out of a third floor window because I was leaving and I got no room to put this and take it home. So, we threw it out of a third floor window and it came crashing down and it didn't even budge.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: Didn't even budge. So, we all came running down the stairs and we jumped on it and we finally broke it up. But it was like—

YO: Did you get a good grade on it?

DB: I think I just got a passing grade. It was one of those things, just a passing grade. It was one of those things though that you got really involved in it and really worked at it and you'd stay up late at night and all that kind of crap.

YO: Well, that's what I was going to ask you next. What were the classes like? I know you said that in third and fourth year you got involved, but what was the difference there?

DB: Well, the first—It was interesting. I went in with twenty kids in the class that I had Bireline with. That was what they called the Design whatever, one, and there were twenty of us, okay? Two of us graduated.

YO: Really? I knew the washout rate was amazing.

DB: It was unbelievable, unbelievable, ninety percent. Some of the people who were in that class graduated a year or two years or three years later than I did. They left and they came back or

whatever they did, and I'm trying to remember who the other person was in my class that graduated with me. I don't remember now.

YO: David Lose.

DB: No, Dave was not in my freshman class.

YO: Oh, freshman class.

DB: David came in—

YO: That's right, because David had broken time, too.

DB: Dave came in sometime around my third or fourth year. All of a sudden he was there and he was in classes with us. But, you know, the dean was—

YO: Kamphoefner.

DB: Kamphoefner was the overall dean, but the guy—Moore?

YO: Dick Moore.

DB: Dick Moore. Dick Moore was the landscape guy and there was a guy by the name of Thurlow.

YO: Gil Thurlow.

DB: Gil Thurlow, and there was another guy. He came back from—He was a graduate of State and he came back, I think.

YO: Bob Phillips?

DB: I think probably that might have been the name.

YO: Or David Teachout.

DB: No, I don't remember—Bob—

YO: Wayne Maynard?

DB: Bob Phillips—Wayne Maynard, he was a peripheral guy that I sort of recall. I think he worked for Lewis for awhile, as a matter of fact.

YO: Yes, that's right.

DB: He either worked for him, and then went on his own, and then when I was in fourth or fifth year he came back and started teaching the lower grades kind of thing.

YO: Right.

DB: But as I say, those first three years are sort of like a real blur. Then in my fourth year we were in the—there was a wing there, the landscape wing, and that was when I met Fred Stresau and LaMarr Bunn and Jeff McLane—McLane, McLean, something like that. Those were the fifth-year students. I was a fourth-year student. We were all in the same room and effectively, we had very similar to the same projects. I can't really remember whether they were the same project or not, design projects, and, you know, we'd spend hours in there.

**10:27**

It was in that fourth year that I started understanding how to start doing design, I guess, and doing projects—how to get them done. Before, you know, you'd stay up all night for days and just work on stuff and you'd do it for three weeks. And you'd put something up on the wall and they'd come in and critique it. And you'd walk away devastated from the critique. Those were very disappointing experiences for most of us, I think. But then I started learning how to make presentations. And I guess, obviously, I guess the kinds of designs I was doing started making sense to the professors who were grading them. I mean I look back on those five years and I feel a transition happen in that fourth year. By fifth year, a fellow by the name of Dave Jones and myself—Lewis would come in and give us a project and say it's due in three weeks. We'd leave that afternoon and we'd go down and play pool. We'd play pool every afternoon. A week before the thing was [due], ready, we'd walk in, we'd sit down, and we'd do whatever design we were going to do. We'd stay up one night or two nights, make a presentation, put it up on the wall, and we would get great grades. I mean I couldn't tell you why. I couldn't tell you why. The projects, I remember one was a marina, I think. Who knows, and we learned how to take that yellow trash and do layers of yellow trash so we'd get some depth to the presentation and all that kind of stuff. We thought we were hot shit.

YO: Really? [Laughs]

DB: Oh, Christ, we really thought we were hot shit. It's pretty funny because when you're in school you're thinking about, oh, this presentation makes all kind of sense, okay, and when I got out of school and I'm working for Lewis—and I worked for Lewis in my fourth year while I was in school. I think I worked the summer between third and fourth year for him—it was fourth and fifth year. But when I was in school the fourth year I worked some afternoons for him, and it was interesting because the work environment was significantly different than the school environment. All school really did was give you a mental process, a starting to do something, but it didn't prepare you for client contact. It didn't prepare you for the real world. The real world is dollars and cents. That's the real world, okay? If you can make the dollars and cents work then you're valuable. If you can't make the dollars and cents work to whoever you're working it for, whether it's a city or whether it's a developer, they don't need you. That was a rude awakening when I was working for Lewis because, you know, I'd come from the idealistic designs. It didn't matter what it cost. Here's a great design.

YO: You never thought about the cost.

DB: Never thought about cost, never thought about, you know, you're just doing a design. It looks good. Hey, that's a good design. That's not really what they should be teaching you, and maybe they taught—again, they taught us, or I think I walked away with a way of analyzing problems. It didn't have to be landscape architecture, didn't have to be land planning, just faced with a problem, how do you look at it? Look at the biggest thing first and then try and ratchet yourself down to the smallest thing. And that's what I took away from the educational environment and the work environment that Lewis provided me.

In the four years I was with Lewis—fourth and fifth year I think he was our design professor for both years. So I mean he would walk in — his book of common knowledge, I mean he kept throwing that at us all the time: It's the book of common knowledge. You don't know that? The guy was fantastically well read. I mean he could talk about any subject, anytime, anywhere, and he made you feel like—he didn't make you feel small. He made you feel like you need to expand your mind, your horizon. You just can't think about good design, okay? Design is influenced by so many things. We'd be doing a design and he'd walk in and say, well, how did you come up with that, and you start talking about it, and he'd say, well, you've got to expand your book of common knowledge. Don't you know that? Don't you know this, don't you know that? And you'd walk away saying, Mother of God, where's this guy coming from?

**15:45**

YO: [Laughs]

DB: Really. It was—I mean he—I never said it to him, I mean he just—In all the time I was with him, he never put me down, never once. He built you up, but he built you up in a way of making you go out and try to figure out the answer. He wasn't going to give you the answer. By God, he didn't give me the answers to anything, even when I was in his office. It was his practice and still he didn't give me the answer.

I can remember one of the first design jobs I got. It was a residence. I think it was in Pinehurst. And the family had just bought a house—they were building a house—and they wanted a deck around the house, or they wanted their house landscaped, land planned. So, Lewis thought—well, I don't know why. He decided it would be my project so I went with him and we went and met the client and they're talking about what they think they might want and we come and Lewis says, okay. So you come up with some designs. Now with Lewis it wasn't come up with one design. You came up with two or three or four designs because he said they're paying us to come up with ideas. They don't know what they want and we don't really know exactly what they want other than they're paying us for ideas.

In that particular project, I think I did three designs, and I was really stretching myself, trying to figure out three different concepts or designs. One of them was like a curved square kind of design that I was doing for a patio, and Lewis looked at it and said, they ain't going to like that one. And I did a rectilinear kind of one and he thought that was going to work, and I did a circle one and he wasn't real enthusiastic about that, but he said, you know, let's present all of them and figure out which one they like. So, we went and they happened to like this curvilinear scheme and it blew me away. That was the one I liked, but I'm first year out of school.

So, okay, now he said, I'm shocked. He said, so you've got to do the design now. So I had to do the working drawings for this thing now. Well, so I do all these school working

drawings, the sections and all that kind of stuff, and we had to do a gutter. There was a wall and the patio came up to the wall and then we had a brick wall. This is Pinehurst. It's all brick down there, okay? So, we were going to do the patio with brick on sand and all that, and we wanted it so that it was pitched, and it pitched to this little gutter which was right next to the wall so you couldn't see it, sort of like under the wall, and it would take the water out. Great idea, I mean absolutely fantastic. I was patting myself on the back. I thought this was the greatest thing since sliced bread.

YO: Right.

DB: All right. [Dog barks] Hey! Shush up!

So, we now bid it out, and we were building it. And they got whatever contractor it was and this guy had worked with brick all his frigging life, okay. Don Basile had never worked with brick in his life.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: Absolutely never worked with brick in his life. So, I get a call. I've got to go see—they're having a problem. They've got a drawing. Just build it according to the drawings. What's the problem here? So, I get in the car and I drive down to see the contractor and I get out and the guy is probably maybe forty years old, forty-five years old. To me he looked like an ancient guy, okay, because again I'm twenty-six, twenty-seven kind of thing. He starts to show me stuff and he says, have you ever worked with brick before? And I said, not really. He said have you ever tried to figure out how you cut a curve on a brick?

**20:13**

YO: Oh no. [Laughs]

DB: And at about that point in time, I felt very, very small, okay? I said, how would you do it? And he proceeded to tell me how he would do it. What I learned from that experience was maybe less stuff on a drawing, in my way of thinking, would be better because the contractor, who's going to do the work, I know he's got more experience than I do when I was doing that, okay, by fifteen years or twenty years of working with brick. So, he knew how to use the brick. He said basically let me do it my way and then you come back and tell me whether it's okay, and when I left there I said, phew! Man, good thing I got a guy there who knows what he's doing. When I went back two weeks later or whatever it was and looked at the stuff, he had done it so it was very acceptable. But again that was a fantastic learning experience because—turn that off a minute and let me get that. [Break in recording]

So again, that was a learning [experience] and Lewis gave me the freedom to express different designs and talk to the client and try and figure out what the client wanted and then effectively do what the client wanted. But as I say we brought three different sketches for that particular project and literally I think every project I ever was on with him we did three or four different designs and brought them to the client because his philosophy was they're paying us to come up with ideas and we don't know what their ideas are. Now you can sort of funnel them to the idea you like, okay, but ultimately it's their money, they're going to live with it, let them

decide what it is they want and then we'll make sure the design comes out right. In school, they didn't even teach that. That never came up, never came up.

YO: But when you're in school you don't know that. I mean this is something that happens afterwards. So, summing up your experience at the School of Design, what did you take away from that experience?

DB: I got a great education, and the education I got was a way of thinking that has, I think, provided me a tremendous opportunity in analyzing anything I was faced with, whether it was rehabbing an apartment job and how you tackle it to actually laying out the land plan for the apartments we were building, for example. We looked at the biggest thing and then we started focusing down to the smallest item, and that's what I walked away with. I walked away with a great education. I walked away with a better education going through the landscape architectural deal in breaking me down and building me back up again than I would have gotten, I think, anywhere else. I don't know what other schools do, but when I look back on it that's the kind of education that I walked away from so I was extremely happy with it. Not exactly happy while I was doing it, but when I can look back on it and see what they gave me, it was undoubtedly a tremendous education, tremendous education.

And then with Lewis involved in the work area, I mean he just—I can't tell you the other people who worked there, whether they think they had the same opportunity that I had, but in two years I went from a person who was doing just drafting to a person who was meeting contacts and trying to figure out what the client wanted and bringing it back to the office and then trying to explain it to like Ken Sangster, who was a phenomenal designer, what we needed so that he could do the design so I could take the design and go back to the client with it. In a two-year period I saw a spectrum of the business world that I think if I'd gone to any other firm, I would have been ten years getting.

YO: So, you still have that student mentality, but trying to operate in the real world without that realization that things cost money and you have to figure this out.

**24:50**

DB: Right. And I don't know whether it was because I could talk. I don't know, maybe I was a better talker than some of the other people he had in his employ, but I was responsible for some of the bigger jobs. I was one of the key people in the design of Palmetto Dunes and meeting the people at Palmetto Dunes. We did a job up in Tysons Corner, a mall, at the time probably one of the biggest malls in the United States. And again, I'm a first-year student and Lewis is saying we've got to do a planting design for these different planters in the mall. This is Florida plant material. I don't know any Florida plant material. I learned North Carolina plant material.

YO: [Laughs] Right.

DB: That's what I knew, okay, and even that, iffy. So, at that point I think Lewis hired Fred Stresau because Fred came from south Florida. I mean he knew that plant material like the back of his hand. It was no problem. He came up and I remember when Fred got there, probably the first two months he was, there we did this landscape plan for Tysons Corner, and we also did a—

YO: Now everybody's pretty young then in this office at the time, in your twenties, right?

DB: Oh yeah. We're just out of school. I'm out of school a year and a half, Fred's out of school maybe two years.

YO: And these are big projects.

DB: The mall, I mean again I don't know the dollar amount of the contracts at all. The first year I worked for Lewis I got eight thousand dollars. The second year I got twelve thousand dollars. I mean, you know, and even then when we went to—Sally, myself –

YO: Sally Schauman.

DB: I'm trying to remember who else. We all walked into Lewis' office and said, Lewis, we can't survive on eight and ten thousand dollars a year. We've got to have twelve thousand dollars. I was petrified [dog bark] that he wasn't going to give us this raise.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: I was petrified, and he gave us all this raise. I remember Sally and I sort of talking, saying we hoped he could afford it, because we were going from eight to twelve and I think there were four of us and that meant it was like sixteen or eighteen or twenty thousand dollars and we're not privy to any of the dollar amounts that he's getting in. He could have been getting a hundred thousand dollars a job for all we knew and paying us whatever he was paying us, but we thought it was staggering because we were going to increase our salary by fifty percent. I mean that was a big thing. My little heart was going like that.

YO: [Laughs] I guess so.

DB: Now I look back on it and say my God, how did you survive on eight thousand dollars for a year? Jeez! But we did Tysons Corner Lewis again allowed Fred and myself the –

YO: LaMarr Bunn was working on that one, too, wasn't he?

DB: He might have been, but when Fred came in, my memory is Fred really took over the planting of it because he knew the plant material backwards and forwards.

YO: Right.

DB: But we were also involved in doing a design for a misting system. And so, Fred did the planting design and we figured out what the height of the material was and then we did a design of different riser heights with little heads on them to mist each one of the plants. So they built the planters with all these little risers in them everywhere. This plumbing was all in there. When we set up the planting list, we set it up by court, I think it was by court, court one, court two, court, whatever the courts were, and we sent it down to the nursery to get the material and they were

supposed to ship it up by each court. They did, but unfortunately they didn't tell whoever was unloading them where to unload them.

So, our design was done. We had done the design, we had bought the plant material, the trucks were coming up, and Lewis told Fred and myself, we're going up to plant Tysons Corner. So, we figured we're going to go up there, the plants would come off the truck, we'd truck them there and we'd show them exactly where to plant them in the planter because they were based upon the height and everything else, no problem. So, we get up there, the truck must have got there early or something, I can't remember, but all the plant material's out. And they had unloaded it, obviously. We're sitting there looking at it and saying, holy shit.

**30:05**

YO: Oh no. [Laughs]

DB: The plant material—it's at the wrong end of the mall. So, Fred and I sat there and said, what are we going to do, because we can't move it now? This plant material was going in—I'll say it was a week. On a Saturday night, they were having the grand opening of the mall.

YO: Oh no.

DB: Okay? So, this had to all be put in and finished so they could have this grand opening and it was a black tie affair. So now Fred and I—again, remember now, I'm—let's see. I'm twenty-seven years old. Was I twenty-seven years old or twenty-eight? Yeah, twenty-seven years old. Fred is twenty-eight, or maybe he was my same age because I'd been two years so I was twenty-two when I got there so I may be older than Fred, as a matter of fact, or we're the same age. Anyway, here's two guys, I'm one year out of school, he's two years out of school, and we must have—I'm trying to think whether it was a hundred thousand dollars of plant material that was there. I mean it was a staggering amount of money of Florida plant material and we know now that we don't have the manpower to move it from one side—I mean this mall was a huge mall—to move it from one place to the other place. So, we sat there and we started redesigning the planting. We took the plants that were available and we started figuring out, okay, now we've got to plant these in the courts, various courts, because that's what we've got to do. I called Lewis and said, Lewis, this is where we're at, and Lewis said, well—

YO: You're there.

DB:—do what you got to do. Get it done. So, Fred and I, mostly Fred because he knew the plant material and stuff, said here's what we're doing, and we ended up, planting and planning with every plant: Bring that thing over here, put it here, and we'd plant it. We got it all done, we went to the opening, everybody was real happy, we show them how to use the mist system, we leave, get a call a week later or two weeks later: The plant material's not doing good. You need to get up here. We come up, okay, and of course they haven't timed it right. They've got too much water or not enough water. And so, we're up there and we then go up every week to make sure that this misting system is timed right and working right and all that kind of stuff, and I think after I left, I heard that they turned it off because it was too complicated for the maintenance staff of the mall to handle. And of course again we're thinking, how complicated can it be? It's a timer. You put it on timers, but they didn't have—

Again, that was a situation, I think, where you came up with a great idea, this misting system, and I forget—Lewis had done something, some other mall that he got into this idea of this misting system and putting the plumbing in because nobody ever watered the plant material correctly. It needed to get the foliage wet and they would just water the—so he said this misting system—and he sold the developer on the misting system and it probably cost the developer—I'm picking a number—ten or fifteen or twenty thousand dollars in plumbing because we're talking about copper pipe and risers and all that kind of stuff. So, we spent a lot of time doing the design, they spent a lot of dollars building it, and then probably within two years or three years, it was not being used. It was a relic, the misting system, and I'm sure then they started losing the plant material and they had to put other kind of plant material in that didn't look like what we designed. But again the problem with all that was as designers you're thinking well, this tree looking this way is going to be great. You know what the developer thinks? It's a tree. It's there. It's doing what it's got to do. The public walking down there, they don't know that it's a palmetto or a cactus. Maybe they know the difference—

YO: Or a ficus.

DB: Yeah, but they don't really care. It's not a big deal to them. But to us in the profession, we think it's like Holy Grail. It's not. It really isn't, okay? Do the job. The guy needs plant material there that's going to look good, okay, but in fact make it simple, make it easy, make it easy to maintain. We didn't get that kind of stuff in school. That's an experience kind of thing. It's unfortunate. It shouldn't be.

**34:55**

But, you know, we did that job. We did another job for a guy down at the coast. I forget the—I want to say the name was Ferris, but it was a marina. [Dog barks]

He's going out the door. The workman is going out the door so they've got to go check.

YO: Okay.

DB: We did some marina. My recollection is that LaMarr was really responsible for that marina job. That was down—I want to say on the North Carolina coast. I wasn't really involved too much in that. [Interruption, break in recording]

YO: Okay.

DB: I vaguely remember that being a reasonably big project, but I really wasn't involved in that. At about the same time, we were working on Palmetto Dunes, or we started working on Palmetto Dunes. And I spent at least a year before I left on Palmetto Dunes because when I left they were just starting to break ground on the entrance road to Palmetto Dunes, and that was an interesting thing because we got a call—Palmetto Dunes was a two thousand or twenty-five hundred acre parcel on the ocean at Hilton Head Island, but the vegetation, it was just—you couldn't walk through the place. It was just that heavy in vegetation, whether it was ficus trees or palmetto. I don't care what it was. You couldn't walk through it. So, Lewis sort of said, look at it as though it's just a matrix of plant material. We can't really be worried about specimens in here, and so we didn't. We were more concerned about making sure that the design ended up being every lot was on either the golf course or on a canal or on the beach, beach front or four or five rows back from

beach front. When we got the project the developers—and there were seven or eight of them and they were from Greenville, South Carolina, I think.

YO: Well, Bill Gregory was president of Palmetto Dunes Development.

DB: Bill Gregory, I remember that name, yeah. I think they were from Greenville, South Carolina.

YO: Mm hmm.

DB: When we went down to meet with them, or they came up to meet with us, I forget which it was, they had already sold off a block off—I'm picking a number now—a hundred lots or two hundred lots, and they were T intersections. So their front row was ocean front and then they had, I'll pick a number, five or six rows of houses back, okay, and it was just a simple T. That's how they got their first slug of money, I think. So, when we saw that we said, oh, it's the frigging wrong design, but it's already done. That was on just a section of the grounds. Then they told us we've got an erosion problem and we need to figure out a way of stopping erosion, the southern flow of sand down the beach. I forget who came up with the idea of these—I forget what they're called now. You took two big tubes, filled then with sand, and sent them out—jetties, all right? So, we had to get sand from someplace. So the idea was, well, we'll get the sand from digging the canals, so really the canals were a result of the need to have these jetties sitting out on the shore, on the beach every—pick a number—every hundred feet, every two hundred, whatever the heck it was. So, we needed a great quantity of sand, so the canals were where we got the sand. Then we said, well, we've got the canals, the canals are water, water sells, so we put houses on the canals or the houses around the golf course and that's how we're going to get the value of these lots as high as we can get them. So we spent, God, I don't know how many months designing this two thousand-acre tract of ground. Well—

YO: This was kind of a remarkable position for a landscape architecture firm to take with a developer, right?

**39:48**

DB: Un-frigging-real. I mean, how they got to Lewis, and I think after they got to Lewis and after we started showing them—and we probably threw out five, six, seven different kinds of designs, okay, and we were talking to them about what we were doing. I think that they understood the significance of what we were doing, which was—I think their thought was we'll do all these lots and we'll have a golf course, but when we started talking about every lot's going to be on a golf course or every lot's going to be on a water feature, or every lot's going to be on the beach, all of a sudden the value of the land increased because of what was happening. And that's a lesson that I carry with me today. I mean as a developer every frigging lot you design—every apartment that we designed I made sure it looked out on an open space. With our buildings we created—when I first came to work with my brothers some of the designs of the apartments were where you'd walk in your front door and the apartments would be doubled loaded, okay? So somebody would be looking at a parking lot and somebody would have to walk all the around the building to get into their building and they'd be looking at some grass, maybe. Well, we decided that all of our apartments were going to be three units so you'd walk in from the parking

lot side and the back side would always look at a landscaped space, open space at least. So, literally all of the designs, after we got rid of the stuff that we had started with some other people, all the designs ended up doing that and I think we created living environments for people—they don't know that we did that. They just know that when they walk in and they're sitting in their living room they're looking out at an open space, not looking at a parking lot. But you can go to most apartment jobs and you're in your living room looking at a parking lot.

YO: So, you feel like that goes back to that experience with Palmetto Dunes?

DB: Oh, without a doubt, without a doubt. We did a job in Chadds Ford. It started out as an apartment job and it was a job where the property was heavily treed with beech trees, beech trees as big as—huge.

YO: Four to six feet.

DB: Four to six foot trunks. So, we had the engineer come in and they staked each one of the trees and then I took the footprint of our unit and I cut it up. We had to put two hundred forty of these—we could put two hundred and forty units on the property. It was maybe ten units to the acre. I forget what it was now, some number, but two hundred and forty units. I spent probably three months with these squares and a piece of paper, you know, the site design property, the out bounds and topo, with all the trees located on it, this big so I could put these pieces on it so I could work this thing to save the trees and get all these two hundred and forty units on it. When we got done, the planning commission and the board of supervisors thought we had done a superb job. We ended up saving literally all the beech trees we could, but again it's one of those things where, in your mind, I'm looking at these little dots on a piece of paper, that's the trunk of the tree. Jeez, I forgot the trunk of the tree is the trunk of the tree, but the branches go out –

YO: Oh, yeah. [Laughs]

DB:—forty, fifty feet, okay?

YO: Right.

DB: So, we're building this job now, my brother's responsible for getting it built, and he called me one day and he says, Don, we've got a problem. I said, what's the problem? He said, well, we're up to the second floor and we've got a beech tree branch that's in the eave, so what do you want to do? I said, can we cut the eave so the branch can stay without cutting the branch? He said, sure, we can do that. So we ended up doing that. That happened to be next to a balcony.

Well, long story short, we changed the job from an apartment job to a condominium. This was in '74, when we had the first oil crisis. And we're trying now to price the condo. We walk our real estate person up and walk her in and she walks out on the balcony and here's this—it's like you're sitting in the trees. Five thousand dollars more for that unit, because we didn't cut that branch down and because people were sitting in the trees. So, that's just the kind of stuff that became valuable. Trees were valuable, water was valuable, open space was valuable, so how do you design to create the value, because it was being put in my pocket and I was very conscious of it being put in my pocket.

**45:35**

When I'd take my plans to various townships to get them approved, I always was — Lewis always — We were always on the cutting edge, always on the cutting edge, and I think that was from his book of common knowledge. The more stuff you know, the more you can bring the stuff in and have it influence your design. I'll give you an example. We were doing a project, and this was in I want to say the late '80s. It was before all the wetland stuff was really big. When we were in school—I have to step back—when we were in school Lewis and Dick Moore and maybe the other guy, but those were the only two guys I remember—they were big about sand dune protection. They were fifty years ahead of their time with knowing this stuff that you had to be aware of, that you could actually design stuff and still protect those critical elements that you needed to protect in order to protect what you were building. I won't forget that, because we had some project where were down at the beach. He had a place down at –

YO: Topsail.

DB: Topsail Island. He invited us down there and he was showing us, he was planting grasses in the dunes in order to stabilize the dune so the dune wouldn't go away. Of course I'm hearing this and I'm thinking, what is he talking about? How is this going to—ten years later or twenty years later, my God, he was way ahead of his time, but back then when he was telling you this, yeah, you hear it, but I didn't really believe too much of it, you know, kind of thing.

YO: Right.

DB: But he was there. He was an amazing—he is an amazing guy, not was, he is an amazing guy because he's still alive. When I look back at that, and some of the stuff that we did, it's made my life and the value of what I did much better. As I say, the communities that we developed through the apartments that we built or the condos we built or even the townhouses we built reflect that kind of thought process, the land planning, to make sure that we were providing our buyers or our renters environmental spaces that were at least reasonably good to look at, and we had to do that within the confines of we got to make a buck, and that's hard to do, especially in the real estate business.

YO: But what I'm hearing you say, which is kind of counter to what some of the newer landscape architects are running into, is that it is possible to design in consideration of the site and turn the bucks for the developers.

DB: Without a doubt.

YO: I mean you're doing that, right?

DB: Without a doubt, okay? In fact it's hard to –when I first started working with my brothers I said, guys. We don't want to have parking on both sides of the building. We want it loaded one side, that's what we want to do, so that we're selling or renting this other space out the other side. They said, Don, if you can get, whatever the number of units we had to get on the job, he said, you do it, we'll build it. But I had to convince them and then after some time they came to realize that we were getting higher rents or higher sales prices because of that kind of design. So

it can be done and it didn't cost any more money. We got the same number of units. We had to provide the same amount of parking, almost the same linear footage of parking rows or whatever, okay, so it can be done.

**49:55**

Right now I'm on our planning commission and I'm the supervisor of a township and it's appalling the drawings that come in. It's appalling, but I can't do anything about it because I'm sitting on the township side now and I look at them and I think to myself, guys, I could design this in my sleep and come up with better designs than you're coming up with.

YO: Do you tell them that?

DB: I can't.

YO: Right.

DB: I can't. It was very frustrating because when I'd come in to the boards and present our plans these people on the other side of the board, they had no idea what I was talking about.

YO: Really.

DB: No idea. But I was going to tell you, so we're doing a job and at that time they'd come with you can't mess in a wetland, you can't touch a wetland. I said, so if I understand you correctly, the wetland—we defined where the wetland is, we determined where it was. I said, so I can't disturb anything past that line, is that correct? But on this side of the line I can disturb, is that right? I'm looking at this wetland that they're looking at, okay, and it's scrubby and—now I'm trying to sell it, because I'm going to have units looking at this thing and I'm trying to sell it, and I'm saying, ain't no way Joe Q Public is going to look at that thing and say, that looks good. So I said, okay. So I can take and put a moat around this thing, can't I, so I have water now around it, right? They said, yes, you can, but that's going to have a detrimental impact on the wetland. I said how's it going to have a detrimental impact on the wetland? Well, it'll dry the wetland out. I said, no, if the water's up to the same level, it will still be wetland, but at least I now have a water feature between me and this wetland that you guys all think is so beautiful. And that's fine. You can think it's beautiful, the test is, can I sell it. That's beautiful. Because on two fronts, one, I'm the developer, I'm getting dollars for what I'm doing, and the person who's buying it is now looking at something that they're going to perceive as reasonably nice looking.

If you talk to a lot of people who are in the save-it-at-any-cost kind of thing, they're not thinking that way. They're just thinking don't touch it. That's not being real. Other people looking at that look at it and say, I don't think that looks very good. Just because you think it looks good doesn't mean the next guy's going to think it looks good. I, the developer, I'm taking all the risk. I'm buying the ground. I'm putting up the buildings. I got my ass mortgaged to the hilt to get this thing done. I got to sell these things and if I don't sell them, I'm the one that's going to suffer. So, of course the developer's the big bad guy. He's building all this shit that everybody—but everybody's got to live somewhere, but we're still the bad guy because we're making all this money. All these townships, they would say—let's assume it was zoned twenty units to the acre and you could built four hundred units—Don, why don't you just build three

hundred units? I'll tell you what, when was the last time you went to your boss and said, I don't want a raise this year. You keep the money, mister. I'm happy where I'm at.

YO: Right.

DB: Don't be taking money out of my pocket. You zoned it for four hundred units, I'm putting four hundred units on it, but I'm going to put four hundred units on it that are going to make this thing look good when I'm all done and I'm going to make money doing it. But when I'm talking to these people, it's like I'm talking to a wall. I'm talking blasphemy. I'm thinking to myself, what's wrong with what I'm doing? Explain to me what—well, Don, there's too many units. Then you should not have zoned it that way. You zoned it that way, now I'm going to do it that way. But when I do it, I'll do it better than anybody else will do it. Without a doubt I'm convinced—I forget who taught me grading. Maybe it was this—I forget his name now, it was an older guy.

YO: Thurlow?

DB: It could have—I don't really remember now. It could have been. I mean, I didn't know it at the time, but I really enjoy doing grading plans and I can take a piece of ground and I can intuitively do a grading plan and make sure I know the water's going to get away from the buildings. Maybe it was because I just have that ability to be able to look at things and think that way, but somebody taught me it, and whoever it was in school, I'm very thankful for it, because when I'm looking at drawings now on this side of the table, I look at them and say, that's not going to drain right. Or you say to them, why do all these retention basins have to be like engineered blocks? Can't we make the ground move? Why does it have to—make it look like it's natural. Make it look like it belongs there. Again, these things about—

**55:42**

I still have to go back. When I was doing this thing about the wetland—so now I came in and I did a design and got the design approved where we came in and we dug around the wetland, okay? But in order to do that I had to go up to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources, because they were formulating regulations at the time, and I said, right now your regulations say wetland, and from there on I can do whatever I want. Is that right? Yes. Within a year the regulation had changed now. It was a fifty-foot buffer from the wetland line, a fifty-foot buffer. So I said, okay, so now it's fifty feet, so now I'll put the water fifty feet away.

YO: [Laughs] Right.

DB: But again, this stuff was how do you take this potential negative and make it a positive, and nobody ever looks at it that way. Well, in my head, the land planner, the landscape architect, is the only one that's got the capability of looking at this stuff and saying how are you going to do that? It's just a puzzle. You've got fifty pieces of the puzzle. You got to put it together so it all works right. I had never practiced landscape architecture other than two years with Lewis. In my own account, I couldn't practice anyway, okay, because you can't do work and get protected. You can't get the design insurance. You can't get it if you're doing your own work.

YO: Oh, really?

DB: The insurance company won't give you that kind of insurance, so I've never practiced, but that doesn't mean that the education that I got in school, the education that I got from Lewis' interaction, didn't put me in great stead, because that's all I do. I can't tell you the number of pieces of ground that I did designs on that we never bought because I did the design and ran the numbers and said this is the linear footage of road we've got to put in and all this and this is the number of units we're going to get and it doesn't make sense. By the time we pay the landowner, it doesn't make any sense. I did a big tremendous matrix. I had these sheets that would say, okay, I did a land plan for a hundred acre piece: How many lots we got? What's the linear footage of road? The number of driveways? And come up with a calculation of how much that footage of road's going to cost to put it in, the storm basin, all that kind of stuff. You do it on a sketch plan form. I'd do it, the number doesn't make sense. We're not going to do that. Throw it away and do the next plan.

YO: I've heard students, when they hear that not every plan gets built, they just kind of step back and go, why? You do all that work, why don't you go ahead and do it? But it's back to somebody has got to somehow give them some accounting lessons, I think, about how to think about giving the value to the land.

DB: Oh yeah. They don't—

YO: Where would you fit that into a training program for a landscape architect? It's just something you learn on the job?

DB: Well, after I've done it for as many years as I've done it, I would say that there could be a course that could be developed that said, okay, take a piece of ground, and say it's zoned for whatever the density is. So your job is to whatever density is allowed, put it on the ground, and then show me what the economics are of that piece of ground. Well, if you've done your subdivision, you know where the roads are, you can figure out what the cut is, if you can visualize the grading, so if you've done the grading and the cutting you know where your storm basins are going to be, your storm lines are going to be, and you can actually do a calculation and say—I got a thousand foot of road, I got five hundred foot of fifteen-inch pipe, and you can do a calculation that says this is what it's going to cost to develop each one of these lots. Now if the lot's going to cost you twenty-five thousand dollars, I've got to sell a house here for a buck twenty-five. Can I sell the house here for a buck twenty-five? You can do the numbers and you can figure out whether that piece of ground's going to work or not based upon the price of the ground. It's just sitting there doing it. It's not necessarily the fun thing to do, but if you're a developer or you're working for a developer, the developer's only concerned about am I going to make money on that piece of ground if I buy it?

**1:00:21**

Since it was my money, before we bought it, I made sure we could make money on it, as best I could make sure. That was from experience. I'd call a site contractor and say, okay, John, this year what's it costing to put in a forty-foot wide road with curb on both sides, sidewalk on both sides, on a linear foot basis. And he'd tell me a number. I'd call another guy and, you know, the numbers are close, twenty-two dollars a foot, so you use that number. At least you had some

sense of what it was costing to do these things. And then you'd say okay, now it's going to cost fifty dollars a foot to build the house, or what's the end product or market we're trying to get to, because you can build a house at a hundred dollars a square foot, fifty dollars a square foot, or three hundred dollars a square foot. It depends on the fixtures you're going to put in the house.

YO: Right, right.

DB: Okay? So, those are all the things you've got to know. If you don't know those, how are you going to—again, when I look back now, it's the book of common knowledge. You've got to know all that stuff if you're going to give the client the best ideas.

YO: Would you say that—like we were talking about wetlands—but some of the regulations that we have now are stifling good design?

DB: Sure, without doubt. The regulations were put in there by people who couldn't care less about anything, but don't touch it! I mean, that's their mantra, don't touch it. Well, we can't live like that. We can't live in a don't-touch-this-area mentality. In whatever the area is, how can we live there and do the least amount of intrusion to the natural ecology of what's going on? It can be done. It just takes somebody some time to think about it. We have now, and probably everywhere, these people that are pushing for these trails. Trails are great, so long as they're not coming through your property. I stress this to people. I say the people who are pressing for trails across your backyard, they don't have a trail in their backyard, and there's a nuisance with having a trail in your backyard. So I said why are we doing trails in the backyard? Why aren't we doing trails in the front yard, called a sidewalk? But because it's called a sidewalk, we all look at it and say, well, that's just that ribbon of concrete next to the road, not very pleasant to walk near. Now is there something we can do to make this ribbon that we're supposed to put in, in a dense subdivision, make it more attractive so people really want to use it? So I've been thinking about it a lot, and I said, yeah, there's a lot of things we can do. First, we don't have to have the sidewalk within two feet of the road and the curb. We could have the sidewalk meander. It could be ten feet off the road. We could have a bunch of trees between the road and the, you know, more trees and a place to sit down. You could make this the trail. What's the advantage of that? The advantage of that is, by chance it's more easily protected by the police, okay, and it's in your front yard rather than in your backyard where there's no way you can get people back there to figure out what's going on back there.

YO: Right.

DB: And, most people's backyard is their private space. They don't want people coming by there. So now I've been trying to say—I tried to change our ordinance so that we could allow that. We don't need sidewalks on both sides. We need an inviting sidewalk or trail on one side, and let's spend our money to make this thing work. If there's a place where you've got a natural trail that comes out, that's fine, but let's not take these trails and put them in the backyards of people, because people can't get there. And I don't want people in my backyard. I don't want them walking by while I'm in my pool, for example.

So, yeah, there are ways for people with creative ideas to do these things, but you just get resistance. When I brought this idea up to the people who—they thought I was coming from some place on Mars.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: And I'm thinking to myself, folks, open your eyes up a little bit. You think you want people walking by your property on a trail and it's not going to be intrusive, okay, but it is. Because where else do you have private space unless you put a wall up? I mean, I deal with this stuff and after awhile, I want to get a gun and shoot people.

**1:05:20**

YO: [Laughs]

DB: There's nothing wrong with what they're trying to do, it's just that you can't wall things off and say that's just—I mean we have all these people around here—we've got French Creek State Park in our township.

YO: What's that?

DB: It's just a state park.

YO: And what's the name of it again?

DB: French Creek.

YO: French Creek.

DB: It consumes almost a third of our township. And we now have trails that come down out of the park. There are trails in the park, that's great, and there are trails that come out of it and they come down to the river and they go along the river, and we have this ongoing controversy. I have a piece of ground in a neighboring township where they want this trail to come through our property. No problem. It's going to go along the back of my lots. It's not going to go down the side of my lots because on the side of my lots it's even more intrusive than if it's at the back of the lots. This is where I try this. Well, look. Our houses are going to be sitting a long ways off the road. This is a treed site. Let's do the trail along the road. It was like, what are you talking about, Don? It's not a trail. I said, well, why can't we make it a trail?

This particular township had an ordinance that said you couldn't cut any more than twenty-five percent of the trees down, okay? I got a forest. I got a forest. I said you're going to tell me that if I cut more trees down than twenty-five percent, I'm going to be penalized some dollar amount? They said well just don't put as many lots on it. I said, no, that's not economic for me. So, in the state of Pennsylvania, the state says that you can forestry any property you want and local ordinances can't stop you. So I said look, either we're going to do this in this way or I'm going to clear cut this property. Their eyeballs go like this. Now that's not what I really want to do. What I want to do is I want to get these people to understand that there's a relationship between this forested piece of property and I'm going to put twelve or fifteen houses

on it. I'm going to put the fifteen houses on it and you can either let me figure out how I'm going to do it and not penalize me, or I'm taking the trees down. No, they got their little—so I took the trees down.

YO: You took the trees down?

DB: Absolutely. We didn't do a clear cut. We did a slash cut, or whatever they call it, so there are some trees there, so it will fill back in again. It had been forested before, thirty years ago or forty years ago. But my point here is I own the ground. I'm going to develop the ground. Now either you're going to work with me to get this thing developed or I'm going to do what's in my best interest, and townships fail to realize that you can't dictate. If you dictate and there's a way around it, okay, there's a way around it. Now I gave them the option. I said here's what we plan to do. We went in and in this particular design we came up with these caissons underground. We were going to store water underground so we would not do a storm retention basin and have to tear the trees down where the storm retention basin was.

YO: Oh, good idea.

DB: Okay? We did a full design to do that. It was going to cost us a hundred and fifty thousand dollars more than if we did an open thing, but we wouldn't cut the trees down. Therefore, I wouldn't have this other cost because I was taking down more trees than I should take down.

YO: Right.

DB: The township engineer makes it almost impossible for me to do this. It's costing me more money to save as many trees as I can and he says no, can't approve it. We've never done this and we don't want to take the responsibility after you turn the job over. The township doesn't want the responsibility. How are we going to clean these things out? We did everything they asked us to do so you could actually clean them out, right. Once every five years or ten years you could clean them out. So they said, okay, you need to put a normal storm—I said, when I do that, okay, then you turn around and tell me I'm cutting too many trees down and you're going to fine me the number of trees I'm taking down or I've got less housing. It's not going to happen that way. I'm going to take the trees down. It's simpler for me to take the trees down, come back to you and say, okay, the trees are down, now I'm going to do my development.

**1:10:25**

This is a township, they're—I mean, I'm trying to figure out a solution so that I can get my houses put on the property, reduce the number of trees I'm taking down, and in that one case I was going to spend more money on storm retention than if I did it the old way, but the old way now was like a Catch 22. So, it's simple. I finally said, either we do it rationally here or I'm cutting the trees down. And of course they scurried. They had two paragraphs in their ordinance about forestry. I said those are two paragraphs governing forestry. I'm going to do that, gave them a plan—now they stop me, they put an injunction on me and everything else, I'm going to court. The trees are down and I'm going to court now and I'm going to sue them because they stopped me from doing what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it and the price of money and everything else. It's actually kind of good that it happened because I don't have the houses, you

know, I don't have that economic thing sitting on me when I can't sell a house now today anyway.

YO: Right.

DB: But those are the things, okay, that my training, my education, what Lewis taught me, and thirty years of doing this stuff has taught me, how to think these ways, how to figure out how to get this stuff done, and I'm dealing with people that are intransigent, and don't do that with me because if you do that with me, there's a way around it and I'll use the way around it.

YO: [Laughs] Right.

DB: Because it's my money. You're playing with my livelihood. Don't do that. Every developer, that's their livelihood. So if you can maneuver this developer to do a good job, you're better off doing that than getting some shit thing that they put up, but unfortunately townships—and I forget how North Carolina does it. Do they do it by county? I don't know really know how they do their—

YO: I think in North Carolina there's a city planning commission, but I think you do have to go to the county for zoning and things like that.

DB: Right. It's probably like Maryland and Virginia. Up here, these little townships, we have, I don't know, five thousand townships up here, so every township's got a different ordinance.

YO: Oh no.

DB: Oh, it's terrible. It's terrible, very inefficient, very inefficient, and you're dealing with people who are not professionals. They're just Joe Smith and Mary Smith, they don't—

YO: So, whenever a landscape architect comes up with a design, whether it's for a—like in your case your own company's situation, there's a lot of educating the public that has to be done, I'm hearing. You said that you have to go in with the engineer—

DB: There is no education.

YO: There isn't?

DB: You can't educate them.

YO: Really?

DB: You can't—I don't know how you—you can't explain to them what I just told you, unless you went through that program that I went through. If I was talking to Fred or talking to LaMarr they may get it. I don't know that.

YO: I think it's a brilliant plan for storm water drainage.

DB: I don't know that they get it. I don't know, okay. But again, we were coming from the point of view we want to save all the trees we can.

YO: Right.

DB: And we're willing to do this to save the trees. I'm sure they're looking at us like you're just giving us a line. We did the design and then they came up with a reason why the design wasn't any good.

YO: Right.

DB: Well, okay, if that design isn't any good, now we've got to cut the trees down. Now you're going to penalize me for cutting the trees down. Well, I'm not going there.

YO: Right. It's a tough business. It's a tough business.

DB: But on that side of the table, on the township side of the table or the county side of the table, they don't care. They have their whatever. They want this trail. They had this trail marked on a one to two thousand foot map. Here's this trail. We said why are you putting the trail there? We want the trail here. You want it to come in here and go out here, we'll figure out where it's going to go. You're not telling us. No, no, no, you're building it like that.

YO: Yeah.

DB: Come on. Only because they wanted to be assholes.

**1:15:00**

YO: [Laughs] Right.

DB: Okay? That's the reason. They didn't like being told we're not going to do it that way. Most engineers who work for townships, they're just engineers. They're not designers. There's a vast difference between being an engineer and being a land planner or a designer.

YO: Huge, right.

DB: You give the design to the engineer to engineer it. It never goes the other way. All the engineers can do is they think in engineering terms. So they never look at a storm water basin as a design element that's got to look good because I've got to sell it. They look at it as they've got to contain the water and that's how you contain water. It's simple. Now can you undulate that? Well, Don, you can undulate, but—

YO: We've never done that before. [Laughs]

DB: And can we plant it with trees? Yeah, I guess we could, but does it have to be a forty-five degree angle? Can it—I mean, how complicated is that? It's not complicated, but to get them to think that way—they don't think that way. They're an engineer. They think one way. A designer,

at least this designer, thinks in another way, and the way I like to think about it is that's the way I was honestly taught in that, I'll call it that seven-year period, okay?

YO: Mm hmm.

DB: The first three years I sort of don't remember, the last two years in school I sort of remember, but for sure the two years with Lewis in the work environment, crystal clear, crystal clear.

YO: What kind of a boss was he? I know you said he kind of let you go out on your own and learn things.

DB: Listen, he was—at one level, I was afraid to go in and talk to him because I was afraid I was going to say something wrong, I think, but in my personal experience, he allowed me to do—how can I tell you? He pulled out of me whatever there was in me that was uniquely Don Basile's contribution. I'm not sure—I worked for Ed Stone, a guy up in Connecticut, for a summer and he told you everything you had to do. So he told you how those rocks were going to be shown for a rock plant, or whatever, okay? Lewis never did that. Lewis—maybe it's because of the teacher that he is, he'd look at stuff and then he'd question why you were doing whatever you were doing, why you were doing it the way you were doing it, I think only to have you think about is there another way of doing it. When he would say we're going to have three ideas brought to the client he was—I don't know that he made any money. I don't know whether from a business point of view he was successful. I don't know that. I wasn't there long enough to really understand that. But from my personal growth and learning experience and what I still carry with me today—the greatest two years of my life.

YO: Well, that's very kind of you to say that.

DB: And I haven't gone back to Lewis and told him that, but when I look back, he's the foundation. Without that two years, I'm not sure that I'd have the philosophy that I have. Had I gone to another firm, I know I would not have gotten the opportunity of meeting clients and talking with the client and trying to figure out what the client wanted and then go back and tell the guys in the office, or the guys and girls in the office, what we needed to do.

When I was there Ken Sangster, who graduated I think two years before me or three years before me, and I think he worked for somebody else before he came to work for Lewis, but this guy, when he was in school, he could design this little corner right here on a piece of paper and you would have thought the whole design was done, the whole piece of paper. He was a great designer, but he had very limited verbal skills with clients. So, Lewis kept him: Ken, just sit there and design. Just sit there and design and he'd just crank them out. When we were doing Palmetto Dunes, I think Ken did a great portion of that design and then we came in—Lewis found a guy who back in the day did the horizontal layout on Mylar paper, big sheets of Mylar, but he had some, at that time, cutting edge thing where you go set it up out in the field. I want to say it was GPS –

**1:20:30**

YO: It was Ferd Hobbs.

DB: Who?

YO: Ferd Hobbs, an engineer, who set up lotting lines and things with a real primitive computer system.

DB: Yeah, could have been.

YO: That was Ferd Hobbs.

DB: I'm telling you, that was my first experience with I'll call it, GPS.

YO: That was the first experience anybody was having. Ferd sort of invented that little system.  
[Laughs]

DB: I'll tell you, it was like holy mackerel, and the neat thing about that was that when you go around a curve, depending upon where you put the—let's say you had to have a ninety foot width of a lot. If you put it at the street you got less lots. If you put it halfway up the lot maybe you get one more lot. Well, you know what one more lot's worth? One more lot down there was worth maybe fifty thousand dollars or a hundred thousand dollars. You could spend two weeks trying to find one more lot in this whole project, okay.

YO: Doing it by hand.

DB: Yeah, you do it with the little dividers. He would figure it and he'd run it and we'd look at it and say...and Ken would actually change the line a little bit, so probably we did reiterations of that, I don't know, four or five times on each row. Why? To make sure the lots look good, but to get an extra lot. So it was—

YO: Cutting edge again.

DB: Cutting edge. And we were all there, we were all: Hey, man! That's—and Lewis would say, that's another lot, whatever the number was. That's another, you know, it was like, how would you not think that way? So when I walked away, that's the only way I could think.

YO: Right. But with the design background backing you up all the way, right?

DB: Yeah.

YO: The philosophy of it.

DB: Yeah. So again, that—

YO: It was an odd combination. I hear people always say, well, how did we do that? We just were open to so many things that hadn't been done before.

DB: But what he did was he pulled the expertise, whatever expertise or personality you had, he brought it out of you. Lewis never sat down. I never saw him sit down and work on a design that I was doing. Now he did a couple of designs and it was like, let's go and see what he's doing, okay? But when you looked at it, it was like, so this is the design, okay? Now he was bringing all—he had the ability to bring all these things in so whatever he was thinking he was doing it intuitively. So when I would do whatever I was doing, I was doing whatever I was doing intuitively, as archaic as it might have been at the time, I was still doing it. And then through the process of getting the drawings done it would get tweaked to the point where he was satisfied that what was going out the door was worthy of his signature on the drawing, obviously. But he never came to me and said, Don, we're not doing it that way, we're doing it this way. Never. I never saw him do that, ever, so from that perspective, greatest boss in the world.

He gave us the freedom to express ourselves, be ourselves, and take whatever—and again I don't know, but he may have used me as a mouthpiece. I mean, by the time I left, the last six months I was there, I was going to meet clients and bringing the work back. Unheard of. I mean where would a kid two years out of school be able to do that? Now I didn't do a lot of the design. So I must have been able to explain the design better than some—I'm just guessing. But after the first year I don't think I sat down at the design table and did any design work. I was in a plane flying with the drawings, talking to the client, bringing the stuff back. Okay, the client said this, and we'd lay it out and start talking about what we've got to do and whoever was doing it would do it. I can't remember—there was a guy by the name of Tom [Martin] that came in after, maybe in my second year I was there, and I can't remember whether Roy Pender—I think Roy came back and worked at Lewis' office, too. I talked to Roy. I want to say six months ago. He called me out of the blue and I had a forty-five minute conversation with him, just talking about the design school and where some of the people were and that kind of stuff.

### **1:25:17**

But my experience, it was just a great experience. There was that group of us that was fortunate enough to go through at that time. I mean, I don't really know what happened after I left and how the office went and where those guys really went. I'm not sure that the others got the same exposure that I got. I'll say this. I think when Roy came to work for Lewis he really just stayed on the board. He was just doing drafting work and whatever design work he was doing, but I think he very rarely left the office. Another guy by the name of Tom, his last name began with an M [Martin], he was a short guy. He was in my class when we started, but he graduated a year or two later than I did. He came to work for Lewis for a little while. Again, it would be interesting to sit around the table with Sally and Fred and LaMarr and myself and think about where they went and what they took away from their experiences with Lewis. I know Sally went off and she became a teacher, I think.

YO: She actually ended up for twelve years, she was head of the landscape department at the University of Washington.

DB: Right. Okay, so it would be interesting to see what she brought away from her tenure with Lewis because she was there at least the two years I was there and I don't know how long she stayed after I left. LaMarr was there and he was—Charlie Burkhead and LaMarr and Lewis were really the show before I got there, before Sally and I, and I forget who the other person was that came with us the same time. But Fred came in, I want to say six months after I got there, maybe it was nine months after I got there, Fred Stresau came, and I think Fred was there—he may have

just left or was planning to leave after I left. I can't remember. In my head those—even Charlie didn't go out—I was doing more client contact than Charlie Burkhead was doing, and I think Charlie may have left Lewis either then or shortly after I left. I really don't know.

YO: It was a little bit after you left.

DB: After I left, yeah. I think he was talking about leaving or whatever. But it would be interesting to hear—I read Fred's interview, but I didn't get from—again, everybody else, they had to work for other people and so they were constrained by working for other people—what the client wanted, and they may have been restricted by the viewpoint of the client and what they were willing to spend on something. What we did, we had the dollars, and there were not a lot of dollars for example for landscaping. There were no dollars for landscaping. You know, it's like, we're done? Okay, so let's put some junipers, some trees, put a tree here, put a tree here, that kind of stuff. For example, when you talk to people about trees and you tell them the trunks of the trees and the head of the trees, they actually form a straight line or a curve or they enclose spaces, and people look at you like, what are you talking about? But they can't express it. Until you see it, they can't express it.

YO: A lot of times they experience it and can't—they say that's a great place to go, but you ask them why and –

DB: And they can't tell you why.

YO:—they can't tell you.

**1:29:47**

DB: When I look at planting plans, I try to figure out, other than they're just plants, did you think about these—I don't care what the tree is. I could care less what the tree is. The trees define a space though, and so, did you think about the space you're trying to define? What are you talking about, Don? When I look at these plants, I'm looking at them saying, you know, it's beyond them. Now should I be trying to—for a number of years when I first started working with my brothers, we had a lot of ground up in a township next door to us. And I would go the planning commission and I'd just sit with the planning commission and say—the developer would bring designs in and the developer would leave and I'd take out a roll of trash, that sort of thing, [and say] here's another way of doing the design, and I'd do it in a half hour. And I'd say, which design is a better design, and most of the time it was the design I just did. I said, so that's what you as a planning commission should try to be pushing for. The problem was that so long as they met the book, the bible, the zoning book, the subdivision regulations, there was nothing the planning commission could do. So the only way you could get the developer to see the merits of a change in the design was to show them a new design and say, by the way, the linear foot of road here is actually a little shorter, or, this house is going to face this piece and you're going to get more money for it. But again, the developer isn't necessarily—they're not a designer. They're saying I've got to get twenty houses on here, or whatever, and he gives it to the engineer and the engineer gets the twenty houses on there.

YO: But at the same time the landscape architect who doesn't make that quantum leap from the student mentality into the professional world is not going to take that initiative—

DB: They don't have it.

YO: —to challenge the developer's plan.

DB: They don't have it. They don't have it up here. They don't have the cost-benefit relationship in their heads. I walk around, I have the common knowledge that I certainly didn't have thirty years ago. I was building it, okay, but I have it now. I mean, it's intuitive with me. I can look at a piece of ground—people when they try to sell me a piece of ground they say, let's go walk the ground. I say, I'm not going to walk the ground. Give me a topo because I could see it with a topo. Without the topo—it's a piece of ground. It's a pretty piece of ground. When I get done with it, it's not going to look as pretty as it is because it's nature right now and when I get done with it there are going to be houses on it or apartments on it or something, and people look and say, crappy little developer, look what he did. And I say there's two ways of doing it. You can do it in a grid pattern or you can do it this way and which way's the better way? Two different products. Which is the better environment for people to live in? I think we've created a bunch of nice environments within the cost constraints of what we could afford to do and sell the product, but, as I say, a lot of them are on the cutting edge.

YO: Which of your projects, and if you don't mind naming them and saying what city they're in, which of your projects are you most proud of and why?

DB: We did this job that we did down in Chadds Ford, Route 1 and 202 in Chadds Ford, Birmingham Township. That was one where we saved all these beech trees and we did this design of a through design so people were living in the trees. We did a parking lot where we were coming up a grade and there was this huge beech tree. We probably spent ten thousand dollars in labor and railroad ties to save this tree. It was there for twenty-five years, and it ultimately died, but it was there for twenty-five years. I could take you to that job and be very proud and drive through the job and it's sitting in all these trees.

We did another job called—we did Coventry Crossing and that was a job where we put a pond in, we had to put a sewage package plant in, and we did this design, three units. Good looking job. We did an apartment job just outside Reading, one of our first jobs. Great looking job. It's one sided, looks down into a ravine. All the units in some form or another faced it. You could walk out of your unit if you were on the ground floor and walk down and walk back up again. So there were a number of them.

### **1:35:12**

We did a townhouse job in King of Prussia, very dense, very dense, but we saved every tree we could save, and that was a big selling point. Very disappointing, you go over there five or six years later and some of the people cut the trees down because, I don't know, they either died—again, one of the things you learn, you can't cut on both sides of the tree and think the tree's going to survive. You can cut on one side with your utility lines, and with townhouses and stuff they do because you're bringing in utilities every twenty or thirty feet, but we took a chance and we actually burrowed in one of them so we weren't cutting all the roots. We actually

burrowed through so we didn't cut them all. The tree ultimately died, maybe six or seven years later.

They're good looking jobs, but other developers did other good looking jobs, too. So you're as good as your competition is. The other thing that people don't recognize is that you're competing against different townships, too, and their ordinances. And so, if one township is zoned so that there are two-acre lots and another township is zoned so it's half-acre lots, it's a different product. Out here where we live here, it's like our township's really rural and do people really want to come out here and live on half-acre lots or do they want to live on two-acre lots? Out here most people want to live on two-acre lots. That's why they're out here.

But the courts are saying we've got to have all kinds of zoning so we have a project—there was a project on your left side when you came up Black Matt Road, okay? It's in default right now. I don't know what's going to happen. Here was a project, the developer came in, and our ordinance—and our ordinances have been changed in the last two years, but when they came in with their plan, our subdivision ordinance said you had to have a, I forget, a forty foot wide road, curbed both sides, sidewalk both sides. I said to them, tell you what we'll do. That's something that the township can waive and if you build twenty-four foot wide roads, make sure you get enough parking spaces in the lots, and only one side will have sidewalk, but that sidewalk will meander and all that kind of stuff. The developer said, no. Now, it would have cost him—

YO: Less. [Laughs]

DB: I don't know. Let's assume it was a million dollars. In construction and improvement it would have cost him five hundred thousand dollars, okay? His response was that it's not what our customer is used to seeing. I looked at the guy and said, excuse me? You've got to be kidding me. But it was new to them. So you try that and—there's nothing I can do because he met the ordinance. Did I meet the ordinance, yeah, then that's what I'm building. So you say to yourself, now where did that come from? What did he gain from that? He gained a typical crummy looking subdivision and I got in my township and I didn't really want it in my township. I wanted something different.

I spent two years or three years working with a developer to do over fifty-five housing. He came in and he could have done townhouses, but he wanted to have a specific ordinance so we spent time. He'd bring it in and we'd talk about it and show him the designs and everything. Here's what we're looking for. I finally got him to see. I said we want the elevation to move. Every two units it has to move at least four feet. And all the time I'm doing this design I'm thinking, and now look, we're going to have these driveways coming up here like this. What's it going to look like? Let's start talking about what the streetscape's going to look like. Hey, by the way, what's the back of these units going to look like? Are you just going to put vinyl siding on all the backs? Well, yeah. No. Everybody's going to live out—they don't live out front. They're going to live outside the back on the patio. What are they going to look at? They look at all these back sides, all this vinyl siding. Where are the windows placed? What do they look like? They don't even think [about] that, and I'm trying to tell them. I'm saying, don't you understand that what they're looking at out the back is as important as what you're showing them on the front? It's actually more important because that's where they're going to spend their time, and if you make this thing look attractive, you're going to get more dollars for it.

**1:40:33**

Three years, four years of working with them, I got them to do a certain amount of stucco and wood and vinyl, okay, even on the back. They didn't want to do it because nobody does it on the back. That's another five hundred dollars on a unit or a thousand dollars on a unit. Am I going to get that back? You got to show them [they're going to get it] back. Hey, there's nobody in southeast Pennsylvania who's thinking like that.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: Other than me, okay?

YO: Right.

DB: Nobody. I mean they just—they don't have—they haven't been fortunate enough to have what I've been fortunately blessed with, being at the right place at the right time with the right kind of education and then get into a business that allowed me to take that education and use it the best way I could use it. I read Fred's [Stresau] thing about how frustrated he was when he'd do a design and ten years later or five years later they'd take it all out and throw it away and they'd put something else up. My stuff is still standing.

YO: Right.

DB: Okay? Good, bad, or indifferent, it's still standing.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: Now if we had more money to do a job we could have done it differently, could have done it better. We did a job where we took a storm water basin and we made it look like a natural feature. We actually took water from there and we pumped it back up to the top of the job and we created a stream thing so it would flow back down again. Why did we do that? We wanted to take this negative and make it a positive and we put as many units as we could that looked at this creek.

YO: Very nice.

DB: And we got more dollars for it.

YO: You did?

DB: And then the lining sprung a leak, got a leak in it, and to find the leak in the lining was very difficult. The homeowner's association abandoned it. But while we controlled it, when we were selling it, maybe we got another fifty grand or sixty grand for that and maybe it cost us twenty grand to do it and we made forty grand or fifty grand, right? So, I walked away from that and said, hey, we did the best job we could, we made as many units look at it as we could, stuff a lot of developers don't do.

YO: It's a tradeoff. It's always a tradeoff, isn't it?

DB: It is.

YO: And a lot of frustrations and hard work.

DB: That job we learned—we had twenty foot wide roads. We had road curbs so we figured that was okay, and we packed it in. I forget the number of units, but it was very, you know, it was one-floor living. Everybody had a first floor bedroom suite. It was a neat job, but it was too tight. The road should have been a little bit wider. The units needed to be a little further away from the actual cart way, the road, you know, that kind of stuff. It's there, it still looks pretty good, but it's a little tight.

YO: So, you do go back and revisit, at least in your mind, your projects?

DB: Yeah. You do to a degree. Some of the jobs we owned for twenty-five or thirty years before we sold them. Ultimately we sold them because the economics said, sell it. It's now time to sell it and move on. So you sell it and you go buy something else. Now we're into industrial properties and they're already built. There's nothing exciting about those.

YO: Are you heading for retirement?

DB: I'm now working on a book. My dad had Alzheimer's and he died in '99, and while I watched him battle it, probably for five or six years—you watch his diminishment in physical functions. My mom's still alive. She's ninety-nine and a half, and just watching her walk around. My brother's house up here is set up so that she's got one-floor living and that kind of stuff, but I became very aware that the houses that we were building, and everybody else builds, are not conducive for somebody who's getting older. The bathrooms are absolute hazards—the tub, the shower, the toilet, absolute hazards. Some of my doorknobs are lever handled doorknobs, some are round. I had to change them all to lever handles because lever handles are easier to use. Some people don't have—[Walks away from microphone] this should be a given in every kitchen.

**1:45:42**

YO: A removable part of the faucet for a shower—

DB: So, if you want to do your hair, do your hair.

YO: Oh yeah, sure enough.

DB: You can put these in your bathroom vanity, the same thing, so you don't have to jump in the shower.

YO: Right. [Laughs]

DB: You should get rid of your tub. You should have a shower with absolutely no lip. The floor should actually be flat out level and sloped down so it drains, okay, because that little thing like that—when I watched my dad—he'd get on that and he'd be tippy, or when I see my mom now, if she gets on a threshold at all, it's tippy.

YO: Even a half-inch or so.

DB: Even a half-inch. It doesn't matter. That little thing just throws her off. I can't afford her to fall again. If she falls, who knows?

YO: Mm hmm, that's it.

DB: That could be it. So, I'm doing a book that has, I don't know, thirty or forty things you can do to your existing house. Some houses—actually my son just did one for a lady up in Birdsboro where we put a sunroom and a master bedroom on the back of their house so they have one-floor living. You can do it for maybe fifty, sixty thousand dollars. You can probably now stay in that house for another twenty years. If you don't do that maybe you've got to make a decision ten years earlier than you'd have to make a decision like, I can't live here because I can't get upstairs. You can put a stair rise in. There are a whole bunch of things you can do, but people aren't even thinking about it.

YO: We all had so much fun. We're not thinking about being old [Laughs] but should. You're right.

DB: But when we built the house, we built it for a person that's twenty to fifty, not for somebody who's seventy to ninety.

YO: Good point.

DB: And everybody can't go live in over fifty-five housing now or we can't go to assisted care facilities.

YO: There's just not going to be enough of them.

DB: There's not going to be enough of them. This is a crisis that nobody's even thinking about. I've been working on this book for ten freaking years. I finally said to myself, I've got to get it done. It needs to get out there.

YO: It really does.

DB: So I'm going to put it out there.

YO: Super.

DB: How the hell did I even get on that? Because I was watching my dad walk around one day, and saying, holy shit. Look at the stuff that we built. He can't get around. It's ridiculous. Well, that's what I'm doing now.

YO: That's fantastic. Well, I hope that comes out soon.

DB: I don't know how to do it yet. I'm writing it, okay. I've written it probably four times now. I'm on the last—I'm writing it again, kind of thing, okay, but when I get done I'm trying to figure out, do I go to a publisher and do it that way or do I go through the electronic forms? I don't know yet, but I know this thing needs to get out and I could become even better off if I get it out. I could sell it for, I don't know, twenty dollars, thirty dollars. I mean when you go through this, okay, I go through this little litany of why you need to do these things and I then I give you ten or fifteen manufacturers or installers, their phone number, their email address, so you can go explore it. This is to give you the ideas because I don't know what your situation is. I don't know what your house looks like, but I'll bet you these are things you haven't thought about or maybe you have and it hasn't dawned on you to do it. Maybe there's thirty things you can do in your house that maybe you ought to be thinking about doing them now while you still can walk around.

YO: Right. Good point.

DB: How's that got anything to do with landscape architecture? It has nothing to do with landscape architecture.

YO: It is looking at the environment though.

DB: What it has to do with though is it has to do with saying, here's a problem. Now let's think about how we solve the problem. It's just putting pieces of a puzzle together. Lewis was good about that. All it is, Don, is a bunch of pieces of a puzzle. You've got to grab them all and try and figure out how to put them together and make it look right, make it feel right, and convince the client that this is the right way of going. We had to do that a lot of times. You'd do the three, you had the one you wanted, and now you had to convince them that this was the greatest one here.

YO: Right.

**1:49:56**

DB: Well, after I got done with all that and actually started doing work for myself—you've really got to get into the client's mind and figure out what the client really wants because that's who's going to use it, not because that's the design I did. Back then there was always this pride of ownership: I did that design. That's the greatest design in the world.

YO: Right. [Laughs]

DB: The greatest design in the world is only that design which the client really likes and really enjoys. That's what we're trying to solve, and I was able to do it for myself for almost fifty years now.

YO: It sounds like you've had a wonderful time, too.

DB: I have.

YO: What's the one important thing to know about Don Basile?

DB: Oh, I don't know. I don't know. Over the last fifteen years—my wife is an oncology nurse and we started the Relay for Life here in Pottstown. And from zero to ten years, we went from a hundred thousand dollars to a million dollar relay.

YO: Wow.

DB: In an area that is blue collar. This is a blue collar area. In the last five years, we've stepped away from it and it's sort of gone downhill, but we're now going to another relay and trying to build that relay and we're trying to do it without a lot of, you know, just do it because people need that kind of help. I don't know. That's probably important. The places we built, people go there, they are in the environment, and the environment's a nice environment for them, so that's important. It's very important because you can live in that environment or you can live in an environment where you're looking at pavement on both sides of you.

YO: Right.

DB: So, that's an important thing. But probably the most important thing that I've done with my wife over the last fifteen years is grow—and through my wife mostly because she's very creative at doing a bunch of stuff. You know: Don, get that done. Yep.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: She's spoiled because when we needed something done, go up to the barn and get it, go put it—you need this, you need that. We'd build it and put it over there and it's done. So she was spoiled because we had the capability of doing a bunch of things that she wanted done that somebody else may not have that resource.

YO: Right.

DB: So, that's probably the more important thing that we've done, sort of those kinds of things. I mean, I'm just living my life. I had a good time. Going through the subdivision process is no longer fun. There are too many regulations and people who don't understand what they're trying to regulate. And I'm not faulting anybody, they're doing what they think is their best job, but in my head most of the “green” people, the people who—we continue to put people on this earth and we need to figure out how we can put people on this earth and live within the environment, but we just can't say: You can't touch this.

YO: This is not practical anymore, is it?

DB: If we didn't touch it, I won't be living here or you won't be living where you are or nobody would be living where they are. All these people who are “green” people, okay, don't do this, don't do that. Somebody did, ten years ago or fifty years ago or something, okay? How do you think that house got there? Every time we put a house up—any structure—we're changing the natural environment, so how can you do it—and you can't do these things in the vacuum of,

well, that's the regulation. Just do it. There's a regulation that says you got to do it and you got to do it economically. Otherwise it ain't going to get done. Our system is, you know, our competitive system—it's not a system that derived from the government down. It derived from our competitive nature, and I get very, very disturbed when I'm talking to people who I guess don't see it in that light because it's not a practical solution to the problems that we face. I've been on the receiving side of the regulations and when they come at you, you say, well, how do you get around that regulation, and that's what we do. In our society, it's put a regulation there. Now how do we deal with it and figure out how to get around it?

**1:55:17**

YO: Is anything going to change in the future?

DB: No. It's getting worse.

YO: Is it?

DB: It's gotten worse. I say that, you know, it's gotten worse, but we've also gotten smarter. An example would be forty years ago, fifty years ago, you did a septic system, you did a septic system, okay? Now we require, at least in our township, two different areas to take care of septic. In case one fails, we've got a backup system. Years ago you didn't have that so if one failed how do you solve the—and sometimes you'd have lots that you couldn't get another septic system on. So how do you solve the problem? Well, I've got some people saying well, Don, that's not—I mean, how can you tell somebody to set aside a piece of ground and not use it because this might fail? I say because our experience has told us, over thirty or forty years, that systems fail so we need a backup system, so now we've got to design around that. I can accept that. What I can't accept though is—and an example was—somebody says you can only cut twenty-five percent of the trees on your property.

YO: Right.

DB: Where did that come from? Tell me what the benefit of that is? If I cut more, so I cut more, and you're going to say well, now, I'm not going to get as much oxygen—let's see what is it—carbon dioxide taken out of the air because the trees aren't out there. Yep, you're right, so I'll plant a couple more trees, okay? But to tell somebody they can't cut a tree down—it's my property. Who's telling me I can't cut my tree down? That's because somebody decided that your tree was more valuable on your property than you think it is.

Or we've gotten smarter with respect to storm water basins. We need storm water retention in order to stop the flooding that goes on and the sedimentation that goes on, but nobody's come up with how do you design those things so they look like they belong in the environment? There's no words you can describe to come up with good design. So, unfortunately what we do is we get these holes, and then they say there's a hole there. There's water there. Somebody may drown in it. We'd better put a fence around it.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: So now we put a cyclone fence around it. Oh, that looks good now.

YO: Right. [Laughs] That's true.

DB: Now how many kids do you know get drowned in these things? So one kid gets drowned and we've got to put a fence around every one of them in the goddamn world.

YO: Right.

DB: It's ridiculous. So, yeah, we'll save one kid, but what does the rest of the world look like because we saved one kid? Now, I'm not against saving the kid, okay, but come on, would you? I mean, that's the way I look at things. There's a practical way and the regulations keep getting more stringent and more stringent.

And those regulations cost more and more because as a township we've got to replace storm water pipes through our roads. Fifty years ago, forty years ago, they put in corrugated pipes. All the bottoms are gone in our pipes now. We've got to replace them. Okay. We're going to take out the pipe, put a new pipe in. That's the practical thing that we're doing. We've got to get a permit for that though from the EEP. If there's a creek that goes through it, if there's running water that goes through it from a creek or a pond, we've got to get a permit. Say it's a ten thousand dollar pipe—three thousand dollars to get the permit.

YO: Oh, my God. [Laughs]

DB: Now I went out and I said, so, let me see now. We're going to take this pipe out of the ground. We're going to go five feet on one side of the pipe, five feet on the other side of the pipe. That's all we're going to disturb. We're going to pick a pipe up and we're putting a pipe down, okay? I'm going to spend three thousand dollars for what? So, we can do a drawing that shows the elevation and all this kind of stuff and send it off to somebody in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania state capital] that's going to say, okay, you get a permit. For what? So, I'm going to spend three thousand dollars that I don't have, that the township doesn't have, and what have we changed? So, yep, you need the permit because there's running water going through it and we want to make sure it's going to go in right. I say to myself, we've gone amok. It would be one thing if we're going a hundred feet and we're going to disturb a whole bunch of stuff. I can start to see that. I'm going five feet and five feet, taking a pipe out, and putting a pipe back in, covering the road over again. I'm trying to do that as quick as I can so the road's not closed.

**2:00:35**

YO: So, regulations have just gone way overboard.

DB: Regulations, selective regulations, have gone too far. Somebody needs to look at this thing and say what's the importance of this particular permit here? Do we need all this information for this permit?

YO: Is it going to be landscape architects who take on these kinds of challenges?

DB: I don't know enough about what the landscape architects [are] being taught anymore. I mean, I'm so far away from it, I've been so far away from it for so long, I haven't practiced it really in that kind of a fashion that I honestly can't answer that. I mean, I'd like to go teach some

classes at landscape architectural schools to open these people's minds up that are going through the programs because my guess is they're not, in any fashion, prepared to render the service they could render. The problem is though, you've got to convince the client that what you're bringing to the table is valuable and unless you have that kind of a—unless you're thinking like I'm thinking, how do you tell the client that what you're saying is going to benefit him and it's going to benefit him in dollars. That's the benefit to him. It all comes down to, is it going to benefit you in dollars, unless you're the government.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: The government doesn't give a shit about anything.

YO: [Laughs] Right.

DB: I can spend your money. But even then, okay, you can spend their money and get shit, and lots of times that's what you get because you don't have people who know what they're doing.

YO: Right.

DB: So I think—

YO: Well, I'm going to take that as a big piece of advice for landscape architects.

DB: I think Lewis, for what he gave me—I think everybody else helped. I'm sure Bireline helped me because he destroyed me.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: I'm sure, if it was Gil Thurlow, he certainly helped me because I can do a grading plan, I can look at an engineering grading plan, I can grade the thing and make sure the water goes where it's supposed to go. Then Lewis gave me all the other stuff that I learned in that short period of time and I took that and I built what I built and where I am in my own head. Whether that's good or bad, I don't know. I think it's good, but I think my talents have been wasted because I've been cloistered here developing the jobs I did.

YO: Right.

DB: But I'm not sure—I know I would not have been happy working for somebody else. I was my own boss. I did what the hell I wanted to do, when I wanted to do it, so in that perspective, freaking great.

YO: [Laughs] That's wonderful.

DB: Now if you're saying, okay, could I give something, sure. I mean, I'd look at teaching some of the stuff that I know if I could figure out how to teach it, other than just sitting with students and saying, that ain't going to work. How do you teach that? I don't know how you teach that.

Lewis may know how to teach that. He taught me that forty years ago. I walked away from that and it was like how do you? I can't think of any other way of thinking and it was that short period of time that taught me that.

YO: It was just a remarkable time from what I hear everybody talk about it. It was just a remarkable time.

DB: I don't know if it was remarkable—when you say remarkable, it was remarkable for Don Basile because of the opportunity it gave me. Whether it was remarkable for what was accomplished in my head, that two year period, I don't know. I mean, I worked on Palmetto Dunes, which was a great project, and for the first time, I went back to it this past year.

YO: Oh, you did?

DB: I drove in and I said, holy shit. I mean, I couldn't believe Hilton Head Island much less Palmetto Dunes.

YO: Right.

DB: And so, I drive down the entrance road and I get to where we divided it, and I went over to the guardhouse and I said, I designed this forty years ago. I'd like to drive through it. I had four other Corvettes behind me because we were on a Corvette tour. She said, well, you can go through, but the other four can't go through.

**2:05:15**

YO: [Laughs] Oh no.

DB: I said, well then, okay, I'm not going. So we went and had lunch at the Marriott, or whatever it is, down there, and I drove back out. It was the first time I'd seen it and, forty years ago, it's working today, so from that perspective Lewis should be able to pat his back very well because he was the, I don't know, the taskmaster who got us to do this. He was the one who said, every lot has got to be on one of these things so we're going to sell it and we get the most dollars for it. He was the one who said—when we were doing the design there was one area down where the gatehouses were, where there was a big area where three or four of the canals came together, big body of water. So he said, we ought to put a water village on there. We looked at him and said, what do you mean a water village? He said we need to sell the water. We need to put something on the water to sell the water. So, I think we actually did a design for a water village. I don't think it ever got built, but I think we did a design for it. So, we actually thought about it and figured out how do you put the houses there on stilts and how do you do this thing, so we were thinking about it, and how do you get to them and how do you get groceries there and all that kind of stuff, and sewage. I don't know where you—again, just this unique opportunity for Don Basile. When I left, I don't know what the next project was for the people who were working there and I don't know whether they had that kind of—but for me that exposure that I got from being able to meet clients, from a mall to Palmetto Dunes to a subdivision for a guy who was being a developer to one little house—in that two-year period I was exposed to those things. I'm in a plane flying with Jerry Rooney, okay, and I learned how to fly a plane.

YO: [Laughs]

DB: I'm flying it around the clouds as we're going back and forth. I mean, it was a great time. But I don't know two years after that whether it was such a great time for the people who were still working for him. I don't know that. For Don Basile that period of time, when I look back on it, there is no better education I could have gotten than from State because they tore me down and they built me back up again. I left with something, okay? And Lewis, in two years, gave me that further fantastic opportunity to expand myself and grow to being able to come up and work with two brothers and say we're calling all our shots ourselves.

YO: Well, I think you've just had a remarkable career now based on some of these things that you did learn at State and from the environment. You got the tools and you used them. That's what's important, I think.

DB: That's exactly right. That's exactly right. I was afforded the tools and I was able, because of my position where I was, to be able to use those tools I think differently than probably ninety-five percent of the other students that went through the program, and for that I'm very lucky. If it hadn't been for an older brother who said, I want to build, and one of my other brothers is an architect, and I was a landscape architect, so we said, okay. The three of us can cover each other in the development business and we said, well, we've got to try it. I mean I remember telling Lewis that I was going to do this and he said, Don, I don't think you should do that. I don't think you should do it. I think you're making a mistake. But it was one of those things where Ernie and Bob and I had talked about it for a number of years and we said, well, if it doesn't work it doesn't work, but we've got to give it a try. We've got to see whether it will work, and it worked. A lot of family businesses don't work.

YO: I know, not only just family businesses but, I think I mentioned this before, the landscape architect, architect, and the developer, those three approaches to things, to get a mix that works, you've just been really lucky.

DB: Right. I was very lucky, very lucky. And we bought this place here and we've lived here in a hundred-acre enclave.

YO: It's very nice.

DB: And my kids, their cousins, all grew up here. They're like brothers and sisters.

**2:10:00**

YO: Right.

DB: So, it's a very unique situation for me.

YO: That's wonderful. Well, Don, those are all the questions I have for you today. Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

DB: No. Do you want to go to lunch?

YO: Yes, that sounds great. Thank you very much.

Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

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