

File Name: **Wendy Shabay.mp4**
Transcriptionist: Colin Morgan, 2022 March
Interviewee: Wendy Shabay
Interviewer: Dave Gattis
Location: Fort Worth, Texas, United States
Date: 2014 November 24
Duration: 32:07

Speaker Identification:
Dave Gattis: DG
Wendy Shabay: WS

TRANSCRIPT BEGIN

[00:04] DG: Well, this is Dave Gattis, and today we're interviewing Wendy Shabay here in the Freese & Nichols office in Fort Worth and its November 24th. So, Wendy, welcome.

[00:14] WS: Thank you.

[00:15] DG: Let's start at the beginning, if you could, tell us when and where you were born.

[00:20] WS: I was born in Fort Worth in 1971.

[00:23] DG: Okay, did you live in Fort Worth for all your childhood?

[00:25] WS: I did.

[00:26] DG: Okay, high school here?

[00:27] WS: High school here, at L.D. Bell in Hurst.

[00:30] DG: Okay, and where did you go to college?

[00:33] WS: Texas A&M.

[00:34] DG: And what did you study?

[00:36] WS: Environmental design.

[00:37] DG: Okay, and what made you choose environmental design?

[00:40] WS: I always wanted to do; interior stuff is really what I wanted to go into at first, but I was very visionary and loved picturing things and so that's why I went to Texas A&M, to be an architect actually.

[00:59] DG: Okay, but you ended up with a degree in environmental design?

[01:02] WS: Yes.

[01:03] DG: Okay. Who are some of the professors that you had?

[01:07] WS: Oh, goodness.

[01:09] DG: Does anybody stand out, that-

[01:12] WS: Most of them aren't living anymore, is that sad?

[01:15] DG: That's okay.

[01:18] WS: No, I guess, I mean-

[01:21] DG: How about classmates?

[01:24] WS: Well, Richard [Lowkey?] was actually a classmate of mine, from now, you know, one of the planners, don't keep up with a lot of the architects, since that was my primary program then.

[01:36] DG: Okay, and so what did you do after you got out of college?

[01:40] WS: I went to work for an architecture firm.

[01:42] DG: And which firm was that?

[01:44] WS: Well, that's a harder answer. It was part of Facility Development Services, Servicemaster, and then it was, R.T.K.L. ended up buying them as part of their health care.

[01:59] DG: Okay, and what kinds of projects did you do with them?

[02:01] WS: We did health care master planning. Work started out in the architecture part, but then I started working on some health care master plans.

[02:09] DG: Okay, what, campus planning and stuff like that?

[02:11] WS: Campus planning, started doing some facility layouts and doing all the floor plans and stuff. Did a lot of travel to Oregon and a lot of different places.

[02:25] DG: Okay, and any particular project that stands out from that time?

[02:30] WS: The Oregon Health Science Center was really cool, huge health science center up in Portland and they had nothing in AutoCAD, nothing. So, I spent a lot of time measuring every single building on all their campus to get it into AutoCAD plans.

[02:49] DG: Okay, that sounds exciting. [laughs]

[02:51] WS: Yeah, yeah.

[02:52] DG: And then what did you do after R.T.K.L.?

[02:54] WS: So, I was there two years, did a couple of master plans went from, like, doing the wall section details that most architects start out [at] and then started doing some planning and fell in love with it. I realized I was much more of a big picture thinker, looking at the connectivity and such around, just, you know, campus or a building. So realized I really wanted to get into planning and for that reason I wanted to work for a planner, and also was ready to get back to Fort Worth. So, I left after two years,

[03:30] DG: So, where were you located?

[03:32] WS: I was in Dallas, well actually in Las Colinas.

[03:35] DG: Okay, so after two years, you went to?

[03:38] WS: Two years, I went to Gideon Toal.

[03:40] DG: Okay.

[03:41] WS: To work for James Toal, I was the only other planner in the office underneath James, and we worked on a lot of urban design type projects. I spent nine-and-a-half years there.

[03:53] DG: Such as? What projects did you work on with James?

[03:56] WS: Oh, goodness. Probably the signature one was the Trinity River Vision. I was the project manager on that, worked directly on that. So, that was about the last year and a half, two years of my almost 10 years there, I worked on that. Other projects, Lancaster Corridor, when 30 came down and the whole redevelopment of that. Did several tiffs, did the downtown plan, the urban design guidelines for Fort Worth. A lot of things around the Fort Worth area, there's hardly a project in Fort Worth that I don't feel like we didn't work on at that time. [laughs]

[04:36] DG: Well, this is probably an appropriate time to talk about James. You wanna talk about James Toal?

[04:40] WS: Yeah, sure. He was awesome. He was probably one of the most visionary people I knew. What I loved about James was he just knew how to get things done. He just knew how, who to talk to, how to operate, how to get projects done, very great at consensus building. So, for, again, nine-and-a-half years it was just me and James. We were the only ones. We worked on some massive projects and people don't realize it was just the two of us. So, I learned a ton from him. I mean, I just sat back, he took me to all of his meetings, I sit back and just watched. Most times I was a fly on the wall, taking notes, but got to observe the way he handled audiences and the things he did and learned a tremendous amount from him.

[05:36] DG: Okay, so nine-and-a-half years there and then what?

[05:40] WS: And then I came to Freese & Nichols, loved working with James and we left on really good terms, but one of the things I had realized was, if I was ever gonna hear, have my voice heard and my ideas and stuff, probably need to need to move out. So, and he understood that, he understood kind of being in a company. Him and Bob Herchert were good friends and so he felt strongly about Freese & Nichols. I came here, Freese & Nichols didn't have, at the time, other than you, Dave Gattis, back in the day, and Craig Farmer, that we didn't have any certified planners and so, they were working on some master plans that the architects had got but didn't have a certified planner. So, I came to Freese & Nichols, I was the first A.I.C.P. they had here.

[06:31] DG: Okay, well let's go back to when you got involved in A.P.A., do you remember, was that in school or with your first job or-

[06:38] 87WS: I got involved back when I was with Gideon Toal and underneath James. In fact, I distinctly remember James and I coming over to your office, working on something in Bembrick, I want to say, well, it actually probably was the Trinity River Vision, because we were trying to get the trails down to the lake or something and we came over anyway. Or it was when you were president or I don't know, you were playing some role at the time. But anyway, I remember James talking to you about that. We had a conversation following that he, you know, he actually didn't have his A.I.C.P. but he was a member of planning and encouraged me to do that. So, that's when I first got involved and I don't really know exactly what the year was. It was probably 2002, 1? Something like that.

[07:28] DG: Do you remember when you got your A.I.C.P.?

[07:34] WS: Actually, I guess I became a member before then because I want to say I got my A.I.C.P. in 2003. Yeah, I'm on video so, I don't really know. Don't quote me on that because I maybe, I need to go look at my picture on the wall.

[07:54] DG: That's okay, so you started here at Freese & Nichols, and they didn't have a planning group at the time. So, tell me what it was like then, what kinds of projects did you get involved with?

[08:05] WS: They were primarily working on campus master plans. Again, Alfred Virdurri and several others had won some campus projects and so, my very first project when I came here was Tarrant County College, their district wide campus master plan. So, I was able to really dive into that when it was the first master plan they had ever done. And it was a big project, again, getting to know all their campuses very well. That was the first one. And then, you know, several campus master plans, started getting into corridor planning and downtown planning, and then we brought on the comprehensive planners and have since really taken that on.

[08:53] DG: Okay, so there were no planners at the time, but how many planners are on staff now?

[08:59] WS: There are 12 within our group now.

[09:02] DG: Okay, been any particular projects that you're particularly of that you worked on?

[09:10] WS: You know, there's a lot now, several of the downtown plans. Downtown Fort Worth just had the opportunity to update their strategic action plan after the one that I had done with Gideon Toal. So, it was exciting to be able to do it 10 years later and actually be the lead on that. We worked on the city of Fort Worth urban villages and that was a good one to kind of see it start to come to fruition on a lot of their plans. A lot of corridors that have seen that kind of turnover over the years and now doing a lot of comprehensive planning.

[09:54] DG: Okay, such as? Who you do comp plans for these days?

[09:58] WS: Right now, we're doing them all over Texas and several years ago, we acquired Duncan-Sefko. That was the one thing that I didn't bring to the table was the comprehensive plans. And so, we brought on Dan Sefko and all of his group and, again, learned a lot about comprehensive plans, but they had done some big ones for Frisco. And working on long views, just finished Louisville's right now.

[10:30] DG: Okay, and so all this process, you've gotten more involved in A.P.A. So, how did you first get involved in the actual day-to-day organization? Did you start out as a section officer or-

[10:45] WS: Well, I did. But actually, the very first exposure I had, it was the 2005 conference in Fort Worth. I was on that conference planning committee, and chair of the programs committee, or co-chaired with Dana Bergdorf. And we worked on the programs, got to know, you know, a lot of people through that. That's probably one area I'd recommend to other planners if they're getting involved is start out with the conference committee, because it was a real good way to get to know people. So, started with that, and then I think after that might have gotten asked to do the run for secretary, and did for the Midwest section, and worked with that and then went on to run for the section-director-elect. And so, I went through seven or eight years with the Midwest section.

[11:47] DG: And who were some of the people involved in the section when you were officer? When you were section director, for example?

[11:52] WS: Let's see, Dana was our section director. Of course, Richard Luedke was our Midwest, you know, P.O.D.O. Clayton Husband was the secretary then, and 20 years later, he's, you know. Richard Shell, Ken Baker. Beth Night was long-term treasurer when I was there.

[12:26] DG: Okay, so after the section officers, then what?

[12:33] WS: After that, I think I took a year or two off and I tried to still maintain being involved in the conferences. I've always enjoyed doing those, and then, I think, David Hoover and I talked about running for the state officer. So, did secretary and, and then did the president-elect and kind of went through that, so.

[13:04] DG: Okay, and you're currently President?

[13:07] WS: I'm currently president.

[13:08] 8DG: And what kinds of issues or projects are you working on that you're particularly proud of?

[13:16] WS: You know, there's a couple of things I've always been real interested in, and I think part of this goes back to James, I mean just being able to kind of watch and being mentored by him and learning the value in that. I've wished that same mentorship for every person I know, I wish everybody could go through that same experience. And so, the mentorship was a real big deal to me, I wanted to be able to kind of to put some kind of program in place to be able to do that. Also, just recognizing the, getting a younger generation involved in planning was, it was really important to me as well, so "The Emerging Planning Leaders" are probably the two big things that we've actually implemented this year, so it's pretty rewarding.

[14:14] DG: Well, good. And some of the people you've worked at the chapter level, that, anybody stand out that you've worked with?

[14:22] WS: Well, in terms of the emerging planning leaders, Doug MacDonald has been awesome. He's an up-and-coming star and he's helped a lot because he's just a go-getter. And so, worked, when I was underneath, when I first came in, Renae was president and so when she shared some of those same goals and being able to, again, work with, David's always been great at wanting to get, you know, some of our younger folks involved and very supportive of that and the knowledge of you and Craig Farmer and Dan Sefko and, I mean, just all the knowledge that's there, being able to transfer that down has been really important.

[15:16] DG: Okay, and one of the perks as being chapter president is you also get to be involved at the national level on the Chapter President's Council. You want to talk a little bit about that and what kinds of issues that you may be working on?

[15:29] WS: That's been very enlightening. C.P.C. does, I mean, the Chapter President's Council and even national A.P.A., there's more facets to that than I ever knew possible. There's a lot that they do and, of course, the division's council and all the work that they do, and all the chapter presidents has been really interesting to come together and hear some of the issues, some of the things that we, quite frankly, do really well in Texas. I think we're an envy of a lot of different states. It's just getting to kind of see how A.P.A. operates and all the things that they do. I mean, it really is a spectacular resource that I think I don't, I didn't totally get till I really got a chance to see it firsthand of what all the resources are out there.

[16:24] DG: Okay, and your term ends fall of next year?

[16:29] WS: Fall of next year, I'll move to past president, yeah, for two years.

[16:35] DG: Okay, anything else that you want to accomplish before your term on the chapter or-

[16:42] WS: I really want to get this mentorship going. We've kicked it off this year. It's gonna take some work to really get that really active and going. You know, it's a great idea and everybody signed on and we had a tremendous response, 250 people that signed up to be a part of that in its first year. But I know it's gonna take some work to make it successful and to continue on, so.

[17:12] DG: Can you might describe how that was set up? I mean, it's not just a one-on-one mentorship. You've kind of created these communities of six or seven people.

[17:21] WS: Yeah, I think for a couple reasons we created communities, one, because in my opinion, you can learn no matter the age, it's not years of experience of one person to someone who's been in there 20 years. I think that there's mentoring and learning from one another in collaboration that can happen across the board. For example, I've always been in the private sector and so, I would love to come spend a day at city hall and see the ins and outs of what goes on to prepare for a P.N.Z. meeting. I think it would help me in my day job and same thing, I would love for somebody else to come see when I have to do a scope and fee and a contractor. You know, what we go through from the city side, I would love for, so, I think that there's collaboration there, there's collaboration from years of experience from different types of professionals. Some folks are fairly narrow and others have got to kind of be everything to everybody. So, long story, but what we try to do out of that is create communities of five, six, seven people that paired that paired our F.A.I.C.P., our 20-year folks with our ten-year, with our five-year. Tried to put those geographically but we gave everybody some criteria of what was most important to them and to be able to put those together. So, there's one leader in a group of five and so it's a very diverse group to be able to all come together.

[19:03] DG: Okay, and I hope it all turns out I know, [unintelligible] community!

[19:07] WS: You have.

[19:08] DG: And we'll see how it all works out.

[19:10] WS: Yeah.

[19:11] DG: One of the themes that has come up with some of our interviews has been gender bias, and I was just wondering if you ever experienced anything like that or are we passed that? What are your views on women in the planning profession?

[19:23] WS: Well, considering all the people on our executive board right now are women and have been the last couple years that's, it's kind of cool and impressive. I think we've gotten past that, I don't really see the issue in planning. You know, I don't really see it in planning. I've seen it a little bit being in a big engineering company. You know, I mean, there's definitely some transition that has happened, but I would sure like to think we're past that. I don't know that we 100% are, but certainly in our role, and you know in in A.P.A. and our professional society role. Yeah, we're definitely past that. It really is the last two years. Our president, president-elect, past president, secretary and treasurer have all been females. Which, like, so we might have just swung it the other way.

[20:28] DG: Well, you raised the issue of the engineering firm. It was my experience that it may or may not have been the gender, and there probably was, but there was also kind of a class system among professions. That if you weren't an engineer, you were kind of- do you still see that?

[20:49] WS: That one's probably more prevalent. That one is definitely more prevalent. Again, I think we've made really good strides. When I first came here, it was hard being a planner in a big engineering company and no, even when I came in from, you know, from an architecture side, same thing. We don't make the big dollars, I don't, I wish planning was viewed more importantly as design, everyone would pay big bucks to design something, but they're less inclined to pay big bucks to plan something. I see that being one of the bigger issues is that people not valuing planning the way that, of course I think they ought to because it's so critically important and so I think because of that, fees are lower and that kind of thing that you don't always get the notoriety that you would in other firms and I think our cities are getting better at it, but there's still some that just won't pay to plan and that's the bigger bias. They'll pay to design all day long but not pay to plan.

[22:17] DG: We've kind of touched on who some of your mentors were, and obviously James Toal was one, but are there other people that have kind of shaped your career?

[22:26] WS: Yeah, oh yeah James was huge and he's definitely one. But even here at Freese & Nichols, Alfred Vidaurri was who I started with in architecture and Alfred was really big on professional service. I mean, he's probably the one that planted some of the seed of "give back to your profession." I've always been wanting to give back to the community, but to give back to your profession, and he's head of the architectural board right now but he really instilled in us and has very much promoted us internally to be involved in and give back, so. And then, Dan Sefko has been great to learn from. I mean, Dan's just one of those guys that you know, everybody loves him, he's great at the relationship part of planning, certainly respected in the industry but has got a personality, that you admire because he just makes it easy to, he's easy to work with for sure.

[23:35] DG: Okay. On the flip side, do you have any proteges or anybody that you've helped mentor?

[23:42] WS: Yeah, I think so. There's several within our company. I mean, Shad Comeaux, he's now done a couple of conferences. He's about to plan the next conference for the Houston section. And so, seeing him rise up. Chelsea Irby is one of my young mentors that we actually just hired and she's now the student president at U.T.A. There's been several, Brandon Gonzalez is with the northwest section. So, we've got a lot of people within that have grown up, kind of taken on some of those same responsibilities so that's good to see. But even outside of that, we do a lot of mentoring here. We have mentors that we're assigned to so, no matter, even if they're not a planner, but getting them involved within their professional societies and things are very important.

[24:43] DG: Okay, we've talked a lot about A.P.A., are you involved in any other professional organizations?

[24:49] WS: I am, I'm the current chair right now of Northeast Leadership Forum, which is a lot of mayors and city managers and business leaders in the Northeast Tarrant area. That's a whole other educational deal to kind of see just how city managers and mayors work together with all the, you know, different cities particularly in our Metroplex. So, I've learned a lot just from sitting back and watching them and seeing how they operate. Been involved with downtown Fort Worth, Inc. again on several committees over the years. Through that I was involved with Southeast Fort Worth, Inc to help develop the southeast area.

[25:39] DG: Okay. If you had any advice to give to a young planner, what would it be?

[25:47] WS: I guess there's two things. There's one related to, again, just initially: get involved. People don't always know what they could get involved with. I think I said earlier, getting involved at the conference level is a really good thing. In terms of new students and skills coming out as I'm hiring; one thing that I see a lot of is a lot of students are fairly narrow focused in what they want to do. You know, come out and "I want to be a transportation planner for T.O.D.s for mixed-use development." Okay, I can't support that 40 hours a week. I can't hire for that. We get, I, think broader. I think there's a lot of specializations out there and to make yourself very marketable, I always tell people, "Okay, let's think a little broader, you know, it might be what you like to do but, you know, what are broader things that you can bring to the table because most of the times we, especially on the private side, you gotta be able to do a lot of things and, you know, cover a lot of different things." So, I think that's one.

[27:06] WS: The other, along those same lines from a professional standpoint, I like that A.P.A. has gotten broader in its reach I've seen professional organizations that have become fairly narrow focused and I think it's kind of come back to hurt 'em a little bit. And I think of A.P.A. and what I first thought of 20 years ago of it being kind of group of planners, work for cities. They write codes and ordinances and, you know, land use and now to see us looking into transportation and bikes and, you know, being given money to, because they're realizing that in order to help obesity that we need good, you know, well-planned communities to, for health reasons and just all those different things is that I think, you know, are coming into play. We seem to get broader and broader in our thinking and our reach and our education and I think that's really important. I really am glad to see that.

[28:14] DG: Okay. We've talked about your professional side. Do you want to talk about your personal side? Family?

[28:20] WS: Oh, yeah.

[28:22] DG: I think your family has an interesting story?

[28:23] WS: Well, thanks. They, yeah, we, so, my husband's a missionary and I, of course, work full-time. I'm kind of the breadwinner, I guess, if you will. We have three kids, we have two daughters that are 16 and 17, about to be 17 and 18 next week. So, and then we have a son that we adopted from Africa who is 11 now and that started, we adopted him when he was two-and-a-half. So, it was 9, 10, 11 years ago we actually started looking at adoption, when my kids were, you know, five and six years old we started looking at adoption and tried to adopt for a while out of Sierra Leone in Africa and had a real interesting story, probably another video for another day, about what happened there. But anyway, we did not get our son there, then at the time. But then, we were asked to adopt another little boy and through very raw emotions we said yes and he, we didn't see him until he came to the U.S. and he's now the coolest part of our family that we have. And so, my husband's continued to do mission work, mostly in Africa but a little bit all over ever since. So, we've got a real passion for that.

[29:54] DG: Okay. Your daughters are getting to the age of going to college are they going to go into planning?

[30:00] WS: You know, I thought for a short time that my daughter was going to be interested in architecture, engineering, planning, something along those lines. She, it's very black and white and creative and, but now she's decided on dentistry. So, no. I don't think I'm gonna be able to get her. My other one wants to be a preacher. So, there's no doubt, she'll follow my husband's footsteps and change the world.

[30:28] DG: Okay. Well, we've talked about a lot of different things Is there anything that you want to talk about that we haven't talked about?

[30:36] WS: I don't think so. You know, I think I couldn't say enough about A.P.A. and the people that have been involved in our organization and people like you, Dave Gattis, that I want to get on record as being a real good, you know, help for many years in the history is, it's always, especially, as all these young people grow up, it's always good to have somebody that knows all the history and where bodies are buried and everything else, so.

[31:12] DG: Well, speaking of A.P.A., you have aspirations for higher office, or have you given that any thought?

[31:20] WS: You know, I've started thinking about it a little bit, when you think of, whether that's me or whoever, I would love to see another Texas person in there. You know, we're the second largest chapter in the US and we haven't, we don't have, I mean you and Anne have served us well for many, many years in the national arena and it'd be good to get in a new folk new folks on T.P.C. or, you know, somewhere in there one of these days.

[31:53] DG: Okay, well, with that optimistic note, I'm going to go ahead and close. I want to thank you for taking time to visit us today.

[31:59] WS: Alright, thank you very much.

[32:01] DG: Thank you.

TRANSCRIPT END