

Vicki Young & Sonja Barker

Layton, UT

An Interview by

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LAYTON HISTORY COLLECTION

Verdeland Park Oral History Project

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**Layton City
and
Heritage Museum of Layton**

**GOOD MORNING, MY NAME IS TORI FAIRBANKS, AND TODAY IS MONDAY,
AUGUST 26TH, 2024. JOINING ME TODAY AT THE LAYTON HERITAGE MUSEUM
ARE SISTERS VICKI THURSTON-YOUNG AND SONJA THURSTON BARKER, AND
I AM INTERVIEWING THEM FOR THE VERDELAND PARK ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT.**

TF: Before we begin, I just want to make sure that I have your okay to record.

SB: Of course.

TF: Okay, great. Let's start by having you tell me when and where you were born, and your parents' names. Who wants to go first?

SB: I can. I was born in 1936 in Richfield, UT, and our parents were Reed Thurston and Maureen Ence Thurston.

TF: Vicki, when and where were you born?

VY: I was born June 18th, 1944, also in Richfield.

TF: How many siblings did you have?

VY: There were two others besides us: our brother, and another sister.

TF: Where did each of you fit in?

SB: I'm the oldest.

VY: And I'm the youngest.

TF: Sonja, where you were the oldest, were you kind of like another mom to your siblings?

Did you have to watch them a lot?

SB: Yes.

TF: What were some of the things both of you enjoyed doing when you were young?

VY: Well, we were just free to play outside.

SB: Yeah, our parents didn't worry about us.

VY: We played outside a lot when we lived in L-25 in Verdeland Park. Our property bordered a fruit orchard; but there were tons of things to do outside. We never stayed inside. And it was safe. We had neighborhood night games, and we went into the orchard a lot. We kind of helped ourselves to the fruit. (laughs)

TF: What kind of fruit did you get?

VY: I remember the plums for some odd reason, and apricots. But they had an irrigation ditch at the edge of the property. It curved around and came down to the top of the gully, and past the elementary school. It was maybe a couple feet wide, and about that deep. And when water went through it, it was mossy; so starting from where we lived, we'd sit down and ride all the way down. And one time, Mom got so mad, because she had just bought me a swimming suit, and I was wearing it when I rode the ditch all the way down. Then I came home, and there were holes in my suit. (laughs) She was so mad, because we didn't have money to replace it. But that was so fun.

But we were free to do pretty much anything we wanted. Nobody worried about us. And it was the same with my kids. They played games a lot in our back yard.

SB: Things sure have changed.

VY: But Layton was a great place to grow up.

TF: What year did you move to Verdeland Park?

VY: I was about two, so probably in 1946.

TF: And going back just a little bit, you said your dad was in the Navy. What did he do in the Navy?

VY: He was a mechanic. That's what he did for his career. He served in the Philippines, so he was part of WWII. In fact, he was gone when I was born. I still have the telegram that was sent to him announcing that I had been born.

TF: Wow. Was that when he was in the Philippines?

VY: Yeah. He served on a ship over there.

SB: And he was from Annabelle, which is a little town outside of Richfield. My mom was working at Christensen's Clothing Store when they met, and they met at a dance. She was five years older than him, but he was very handsome, and she was beautiful.

TF: Did he volunteer to serve in the war, or was he drafted?

SB: He volunteered.

TF: Sonja, how old were you when he left for the war?

SB: I was born in '36 so I would have been seven.

TF: Do you have any memories of the war years?

SB: I would have to jog my memory. I'm 87. (laughs)

TF: Some people I've talked to have memories of the blackout blinds, or the rations, and not having much sugar, or gas.

SB: I don't have many memories of those things.

TF: When your dad left, do remember what it was like having to live without him?

SB: I just remember Mom went to Norfolk, Virginia, because Dad was leaving from there. So somebody had to take care of us.

TF: My husband is in the Navy, so he's been to Norfolk several times.

SB: I have a picture of him on the ship he served on.

TF: Really? That's great. Any pictures that you wouldn't mind letting us scan here at the museum when you're in the area, that would be great.

SB: I've got a book about him.

VY: Oh yeah, that's right.

TF: Anything like that would be great.

VY: We didn't know if you wanted personal things like that, as opposed to things specifically about Verdeland Park.

TF: Well, where you grew up in Layton, anything you have would be great. So why did your family move here? Was it for your dad's job?

VY: I'm pretty sure it was because of job opportunities.

SB: Yeah. I think he got a job at a Chevrolet dealership in Salt Lake.

TF: And did you live at Verdeland Park because he was in the military?

VY: It was because he worked at the base. And at some point, our mom worked at the base also.

TF: Do you know what she did there?

SB: She was a typist.

VY: Yeah, she was a secretary. But I don't think we ever had a babysitter. Again, it was a whole different life back then. We just kind of took care of ourselves, and things were safe enough that we could do that.

TF: Right. Tell me your memories of your unit in Verdeland Park—like what it looked like, and how many bedrooms you had.

VY: We only had two bedrooms: one for Mom and Dad, and one for us four kids. We had a bunk bed in our room, and Sonja got the bottom bunk. My sister Camille and I slept in the top bunk, and my brother had a single bed on the other side of the room. It was small enough that we used to jump on our top bunk and over onto his bed. It was very small, but we didn't seem to mind. And then of course, there was a single bathroom—

SB: In the little hallway, with six people.

VY: —and did we have an oil stove?

SB: Yeah, an oil stove that heated the house.

VY: That was in the living room, and there was a little ... kind of like a cubby hole for a table, a kitchen, and a pantry. And that was it. But it seemed to be okay. When Jan got a little older, we moved from L-25, which had the two bedrooms, into a unit with three bedrooms, so that he could have his own space. I'm sure he was grateful for that. (laughs)

TF: When you first moved there, did you have an icebox or a fridge?

SB: I think we had a fridge.

VY: And I remember the deep sink in the kitchen, as well as the washer.

SB: And the ringer. We have one of those at our museum.

TF: I think we also have one down in the storage area for our museum. I've heard stories of people getting their fingers caught in those.

VY: Yeah, I think our sister Camille did.

SB: She got her hand caught, and that made it stop.

VY: We also had milk delivered on our porch.

SB: In the winter, the top would be frozen. (laughs)

VY: Can I tell my horse story?

TF: You can tell any story you want to.

VY: All of the units had wooden rails, and we used to get a rug to put over our top rail. Then we'd tie a string onto the nails that were holding it in, and those were the reins. Then we'd climb on and pretend we were cowboys. (laughs) Imagination was the key. And then outside of our place ... because we were on the border of farmland, there was a hill—kind of like a dugout—and we were told it was a bomb shelter. I don't know if that's really what it was, or if it was just used for storage, because we could never get into it. But we used to run up and down it, climb on it, and play King of Bunker Hill.

That was right between L-25 and our neighbors toward the back, the Ipsens.

TF: Where was that in relation to where the museum is now?

VY: It was right up by the swimming pool. My brother came over once and found the tree we planted. It's still there.

SB: (to Vicki) I think Clark Ipsen is still alive. He's down in Syracuse. But I think his wife passed away.

VY: But anyway, I don't know if that was a real bomb shelter, but that was back in the days when it was very plausible.

TF: And so many people had one. I wonder if it's still there.

VY: I don't know.

TF: Do you have any memories of your tub? I've heard interesting stories about the concrete tubs.

VY: I remember ours was pretty sturdy. (laughs) There were no cracks in it. But I don't remember if it was specifically made out of concrete.

TF: Was it painted over?

VY: Yeah, it was painted, so I'm assuming it was.

TF: Do you remember who your neighbors were?

VY: There were the Ipsens, who we already mentioned.

SB: There were the Christiansen's, but I think they're all gone now.

VY: One of the things we used to do was trade comic books, because we couldn't afford to buy a bunch of new ones. So when we got through reading the few we had, we would go around to all of our friends and trade comic books. Like, "Do you want this one?" And then we'd trade again, once we were done reading those. Well, the neighbors just to the west of us had a son, Clark Young, and he had rheumatic fever. So as a child, he had tons of comic books—like a whole suitcase full of them. So that was always the best place to go to trade comic books, because he had so many.

But people just came and went through the neighborhood, and there were always kids. So we always had friends right there to play with. But I don't specifically remember who any of our neighbors were, other than the Ipsen's.

TF: Were you mostly friends with people who were there permanently, or did you know any of the kids who were in military families who moved in and out?

SB: I don't remember knowing any kids from military families.

VY: I only remember families living there because their parents worked at Hill Air Force Base. Families would come and go, but a lot of them were there because of Hill Air Force Base. I had best friends in kindergarten who lived in Verdeland Park, and they were still there years later.

TF: Can you tell me some of your friends' names?

VY: I remember Judy Hobbs, Mary Catherine Hansen, and Pamela White. They were my best friends all the way through.

TF: Sonja, do you remember any of your friends?

SB: Just Kathleen Christiansen. That was about it, as far as really good friends.

TF: Do either of you have any memories of the winter of '48 and '49?

VY: Oh, I have pictures ... I don't know what year it was, but the snow was so high, it was right up against the telephone poles. The piles of snow were probably taller than I was.

SB: So that was one of those times when you could say, "I walked to school in snow both ways," and you'd be telling the truth. (laughs) I remember walking through almost a canyon of snow. It was probably a short walk, but the snow was so high that it was like a canyon on both sides. Although they shoveled out a path to the school, so we could still attend.

VY: We loved the snow. I remember one time, I wanted to go out and play in the snow so much, and Mom said, "If I put on all of your snow clothes, and you get out there and decide to come right back in, you're in trouble." So she put on the leggings, and everything else, and I felt like the little brother in the movie *Christmas Story*. (laughs) I didn't stay out too long, but it was fun to play in the snow.

And we loved having the gully right there, I'm sure people have talked about that.

TF: Yeah. Some people have also called it The Hollow.

VY: Yeah. We used to play over in there all the time. We had a black dog named Curly Lackey Thurston, (laughs) and we would take him in there. He would just bound all over. There would be all this white snow, and then this black dog jumping all over in the cattails. But it really was a wonderland in the wintertime for kids.

TF: Were you ever pulled around in the snow on a sled or a tube tied to the back of a truck?

SB: I don't know if we did that while we lived there.

VY: I remember Dad did that.

SB: I don't remember that, but my family did that later, close to Antelope Island. We'd just go on that road.

VY: We also built lots of snowmen.

TF: Do you have any memories of things you did during Christmas, community-wise?

VY: I was trying to think of Christmases there, but it's sad—I don't have a lot of memories of that.

TF: What about the Fourth of July?

VY: That was fun. I remember we got to ride on a float, because Dad was the commander of the American Legion. Those were fun summers.

TF: What were some of the things he did for the American Legion?

SB: For one thing, they sponsored Girls State, and I got to do that.

TF: Tell me about that.

SB: There's not much to tell. We just got elected to different positions, like mayor, or councilman. And I was just saw a special on CBS Sunday morning, and it was interesting because they talked about women filling political seats, and political positions.

VY: I remember when they played bingo at the American Legion.

SB: That building is still there.

VY: Yeah. But Dad was in charge of meetings there, and he was gone quite a bit doing different activities. He and Mom even went to St. Louis for a convention. So it was something he really enjoyed. But he passed away when I was twelve. He was only 42.

TF: Why did he pass away?

VY: He had a heart attack. It was when he and Mom were on a sales trip to California, and it happened in their motel. But he was active in a lot of different things.

SB: He had a really nice singing voice, and he and Mom sang together in the [unclear].

VY: But he didn't get much chance to do a lot of things in his life, because he died so young.

TF: Were you still in Verdeland Park during that time?

VY: Yeah.

TF: I've heard stories about a few single moms who lived here. How long was your mom a single mom?

VY: Well, actually, we had rented a house on Liberty. Sonja was already married, so my two siblings and I moved back into Verdeland Park with her. But that's when Mom started working for Layton City. She was amazing. She worked so hard to get things all straightened out after Dad passed, and she provided a good life for us. I had piano lessons, and Jan had trumpet

lessons. But I was too old to get into it. I was too busy. But she was really the quiet backbone for our family.

SB: (to Vicki) How old were you when you were Ms. Layton? Were you going to Weber [State] then?

VY: That was after my first year of college, so I was probably nineteen

TF: What did you have to do to qualify to be Ms. Layton? What were the different categories?

VY: Well, that was long before they had everything that goes on with beauty pageants now. I did a dance that I learned at the Layton Swimming Pool, which is really funny. Wanda Ellis worked at the pool, and she was the instructor for the water ballet class. She had her water ballet class do this song, and part of the dance was in the water. So, I just took that and added more to it.

TF: Did it translate onto land, not just water?

VY: It did, but it was *Sleigh Bells*, which is funny because it was in the middle of the summer. But anyway, it was nothing like pageants are today; but it was fun to work at the pool. I was really happy that they put that in. It was a great time.

TF: Did you work as a lifeguard?

VY: I started as a cashier when I was sixteen, then over the years, I got my WSI so that I could be a lifeguard. And I also taught swimming lessons.

TF: Did you ever have to save anyone?

VY: I had to pull a couple of little kids out, but nothing major. It's such a small pool that you couldn't go too wrong. But it was a great place to work.

TF: How old were both of you when you moved out of Verdeland Park? Either when you got married, or for other reasons.

SB: I moved out when I was eighteen and got married. But then I moved back twice.

VY: Maybe when you were trying to sell your home on [Marilyn?] Drive. I lived there until fifth grade, then we moved to Ohio for one year and came back. And then my dad died that November, so we moved back into Verdeland Park, and I lived there until I went away to college, so all throughout junior high and high school. Let's see, how many different units did I live in? L-8, L-25, C-16, E-2, and A-28. I moved in with [Sonja] twice. So I was there a long time.

TF: Sonja, were there any major changes you saw in Verdeland Park, from the time you were there growing up until you moved back after you were married?

SB: I don't know; I was fine with living there when I moved back. I don't think it had gone downhill at that point, although I think it started going downhill when Vicki got older.

VY: I think one of the major changes was when they built the subdivision just east of Verdeland Park.

TF: Was that Wasatch Heights?

VY: I'm not sure; but there were so many people who moved out of Verdeland Park into those homes during that time, because the prices were so reasonable. Houses were, like, \$3,000 or \$4,000. So when people started to move out of Verdeland Park into those homes, that started a change in who lived in Verdeland Park.

TF: You mentioned that it started going downhill. Why do you think that was?

VY: I think the low price of rent. After Layton City purchased it, there wasn't that connection to Hill Air Force Base. So anybody could rent the units at that point. I don't want to say it became a bad place to live, but there were some things that changed that made it not quite as safe as it had been.

TF: Tell me about some of the diversity in Verdeland Park when you were growing up. I've heard from several people that Verdeand Park was more diverse than Layton itself, because outside of Verdeland Park, you had some of the same families who had been here for a long time, like the Adams, the Laytons, and the Whitesides, for example.

VY: That's very true. Because rent was lower, and because of the connection to Hill Air Force Base, it was more diverse. But we didn't really pay attention to that. Kids were just kids, and they were all our friends. We didn't really have any prejudices against anybody, so that was kind of a neat.

SB: Yeah, I don't remember any problems when we lived here and went to school.

TF: Do you know if there was much interaction between residents in Verdeland Park and people outside of Verdeland Park? I know there was some with church and school, but was there much interaction otherwise?

VY: I don't remember any. We pretty much interacted with our own neighborhood. Even within Verdeland Park, we didn't really know people who lived in, say, O-Court, or E-Court.

SB: Yeah, because there were so many.

VY: We pretty much had our own little neighborhood; but as far as people on the outside, not really. Church was centered around our own ward, and everybody who went to school lived there. So I don't remember much interaction with other people at all.

SB: I have a really nice picture of the Layton First Ward church. (to Tori) I think your museum has one too, right?

TF: We have a few, but I don't know if any of them are very clear.

SB: I have a nice one with the year written on it, but I'd have to do some digging to find it. The problem with taking your pictures out of where they belong is putting them back. That's another chore. (laughs)

TF: Yes, it is. (laughs) Did you go grocery shopping on Main Street?

VY: We went to Winegars, and for some odd reason, I remember that hamburger was three pounds for a dollar. And I worked at King's when they first opened, and I remember Nelene's.

TF: I've heard of Nelene's.

VY: That was a child's paradise.

TF: Tell me more about that.

VY: It was on Gentile, around from Main St, and it was an ice cream and candy shop. And anytime we had money, we'd ride our bicycles to Nelene's, and we'd buy even just a couple of pennies worth of candy.

SB: And we went to the movie theater too. It was down around the corner, to the north. We could walk there from where we lived. And I actually won a talent contest at the theater. I played the piano there.

VY: I don't remember that.

SB: I must have been at about twelve or thirteen. Like I said, Mom was in charge of piano lessons; but I quit playing in high school.

VY: I have a piano, but I never play it. But I remember the Farmer's Market. That was pretty cool. And there was the B&B clothing store—Brailsford and Biggs.

TF: Did you ever ride the Bamburger?

VY: Yes.

SB: We didn't ride it very much, but it was close to us, and we didn't have to walk too far to get to it.

VY: It was right next to the church.

TF: A lot of people have told me that they walked everywhere. I've heard of kids walking all the way up to Adams Canyon, or Andy Adams Reservoir. What was the furthest you walked?

SB: I think maybe to Aunt Lucille's.

VY: Oh, yeah. That was quite a ways. She was my mom's sister, and she lived in West Layton on King Street. But we used to walk to Layton Elementary fairly often, because they had a better playground than we had at Verdeland Park.

SB: I remember they would celebrate May Day at the elementary school, and they had a may pole. Have you heard about that?

TF: A couple of people have told me about it.

SB: The kids would go around the May pole, probably with music.

VY: Yeah. But the playground there wasn't very big, although it had bars I was talking to Camille and asked her if she remembered the Dead Man knee fall. We did that on one of the bars. We'd get up on the bar, fall down and back, catch ourselves on our knees, then swing off.

TF: Right. We did the same thing when I was growing up, but we called it either the cherry drop, or the lemon drop, depending on whether you held on with your hands. If you held on

when you did it, it was called the cherry drop; but if you didn't, it was called the lemon drop.

VY: We thought we were so daring if we did that. (laughs)

TF: Yeah. It was a big thing with us too. Did you ever get refrigerator boxes from, like, J Willey's and use them to go sledding, or build forts, or anything like that?

SB: I don't think we did, although I do remember J Willey's.

VY: Yeah, I don't remember doing anything like that.

SB: Wasn't their daughter one of your friends?

VY: Yeah, Luanne.

TF: Tell me some of your memories about elementary school.

VY: Well, it was a really good place to be. The teachers were very nice, and we learned a lot. And recess was so much fun. In the wintertime, we would build snow forts and have snowball fights—things kids can't do today. But we just had a good time. Of course, that was before cell phones and social media; we just went outside, played together, and had a great time.

TF: Did you bring your lunch to school, or did you get your lunch at school and eat it in your classroom?

VY: I remember going home for lunch sometimes, because we lived pretty close. And I don't know if it was because we just didn't have money to pay for the school lunches then, or what. But anyway, the school itself was made out of cinder block—nothing fancy at all, compared to today's schools. And I was counting the number of kids in the school pictures I have, and there were 35 or 36 kids; so they weren't small classes or anything.

SB: (to Vicki) How many kids did you have in your classes when you taught?

VY: I think it depended on the class. (to Tori) I taught at Central Davis.

SB: And didn't you also teach the drill team?

VY: Yeah, in other places. Tell her about your baton twirling.

SB: (laughs) I just remember marching in a parade, twirling a baton. Mom probably gave up something to buy my outfit. It was pretty. I'll have to find that picture.

VY: That was for Davis High.

SB: No, I think I did it at North Davis Junior High.

TF: Tell me your memories of Mrs. Adams when you had her as a teacher.

VY: She was just like a sweet mom, or grandma. She was wonderful. She was so patient and kind and loving. We knew she cared about us, and we never felt any fear when we went to her class. I was so glad I had her for kindergarten and first grade. And my whole life, I've looked back on that time and thought that everybody should have a teacher like that when they first start school. I don't necessarily remember what I was taught, but I remember how she made me feel when I was in her presence. She was very special.

I always wanted to tell her that so she could know the impact she had, and I feel bad that I never did. But I'm sure I wasn't the only one who felt that way.

TF: Tell me about Mrs. Burnham.

VY: Well, she was a little strict, but we were older at that point, and we probably needed it. But the one thing that I remember is that she was really big on taking personal hygiene. So every morning, she would have us stand, and she would go up and down the rows, checking to make sure we'd brushed our teeth. If we didn't, we had to sit down; and the row that had the most people standing was the winner that day. (laughs) So that was probably a good lesson for us to see the importance of hygiene. But that's something you could never do today.

TF: Was she a stickler for anything else, like handwriting?

VY: I don't remember anything like that. I didn't have really any teacher put pressure on us with handwriting until I was in sixth grade. And I'm grateful to that teacher for helping me write legibly. (laughs)

TF: Do either of you have memories of Ruby Price?

SB: No; I just know who she was.

VY: When I was teaching at Central Davis, she would come and substitute for classes there. Everybody loved her. She was such a special lady. The kids called her Grandma Ruby, and they loved when she would come and sub for classes there. I don't remember her in elementary school though; just later.

TF: I love that she was called Grandma Ruby. Let's see ... before we started recording, you were talking about a murder that happened in Verdeland Park. What do you remember about that?

SB: It was the Langstons. I think the wife and two kids were killed. I don't remember all the details, but I just couldn't stand to think of that in my house. I mean, we'd moved out by the time it happened, but when I read the article in the paper, I just tore it up. So I don't remember the exact details, but I don't think he ever was prosecuted for it.

VY: He was in my classes at Verdeland Park. They had a fairly large family of boys.

SB: Yeah. His mom and dad were temple goers, and everything; but he was not a good person.

VY: He kind of ruled the roost in elementary school, too.

TF: So he was the one to stay away from.

VY: Or be friends with. You had to make sure you were on good terms with him.

TF: Were there any other scandals that you were aware of happening in Verdeland Park?

VY: I don't remember anything. There was just a lot of vandalism later on, like writing on the units, and things like that; but earlier, like when we lived there, it was pretty idyllic for a kid.

TF: Yeah. Everybody had the same economic background, and the same foundation. Did you find that things were really different when you moved out and lived in different neighborhoods?

SB: No, I think we just lived our lives and made new friends.

VY: Yeah, it didn't seem really strange when we were younger, but when we moved to Ohio, some things were odd, (says jokingly) like our neighbors not knowing who Joseph Smith was. (laughs) But when we lived in Layton, we never moved from Verdeland Park-level housing to some place really nice. We lived in places that were kind of on the same level; but later on, it was nice to not be in Verdeland Park anymore.

TF: So do you feel like Verdeland Park was a good place, overall?

VY: It was a really good place to grow up—absolutely. Halloween there was fantastic, because we all lived so close to everybody. We could get all kinds of candy in a very short amount of time. We didn't get big things, but we'd always come home with a whole sack full of candy. And our parents didn't go with us—we all just went out on our own. And we usually made our own costumes with whatever we had. But I do remember the first store-bought costume I got, and it was a witch. I can still smell the plastic it was made out of. (laughs) But we usually just used whatever we had.

I kind of long for those days again, when we didn't have to worry about so much.

SB: It'll never be that way again. The good days are gone. (laughs)

VY: Yeah.

TF: Well, is there anything we haven't covered in this interview that you would like included?

VY: We did get the first TV in our neighborhood, and that was so exciting. I remember Dad and some other guys—I don't know how many—in our house trying to figure out how to set everything up. And I can't remember if The Lone Ranger or I Love Lucy was the first show we saw on TV, but it was one of those two.

TF: I watched I Love Lucy growing up. I don't think my mom really ever watched it when she was growing up, but it was always on TV when I was young, along with Perry Mason, and all those other black and white shows. I played outside a lot too, but I also loved watching I Love Lucy.

VY: I remember that getting that TV was really something. I mean, we could watch all these things come up on that little screen. But it's so different now. Everybody has four TVs, and they're always streaming.

TF: Right. When you got your TV, did your house become kind of a gathering place for other kids?

VY: I don't remember. Everybody's house was small, so it's not like we had huge groups that went to anybody's house. It wasn't like a party house.

TF: When you got your TV, were your parents worried that it would take the place of you going outside? Did they kind of regulate the time you spent watching it?

SB: I don't think they did.

VY: They didn't ever say anything like, "You need to be outside," because I don't think we were necessarily glued to the TV. We were so into playing with friends that we still went outside. We watched Saturday morning cartoons, and a few different shows, but there weren't many shows on back then.

TF: And there was the evening news. You didn't have the news on your phone 24/7.

VY: Yeah. I think we'd be better off now if we didn't have access to so much information on our phones all the time, but that's just me.

TF: Yeah. Well, that's all I can think of. (recording stops)