

Mr. Ken Carden

Disability Law Attorney

Interview conducted by

Jason Fournier

On April 20, 2018 in Dallas, Texas

Masters of History Non- Thesis, Archival Administration Certification

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Biography

Ken Carden graduated from Texas A&M University in 1970 and was commissioned into the United States Regular Army as an infantry lieutenant. He was injured and retired as a T-5 paraplegic, now using a wheelchair.

He earned his law degree, graduating from Southern Methodist School of Law in 1975. Kenneth became a successful trial lawyer with over 300 jury trials, and is licensed to practice of law before the United States Supreme Court, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, all Federal District Courts of Texas, and all state trial and appellate courts in the State of Texas and the State of Illinois.

Before associating himself with Cirkiel & Associates, his practice consisted exclusively of disability civil rights law under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Fair Housing Act, the Rehabilitation Act, the Texas Architectural Barrier Act, the Texas Fair Housing Act, and the Texas Human Resources Code.

Ken is an avid sailor and lived on a 34foot sloop named Makaila from 1985 to 1990. He sailed from Galveston to Grenada, until he lost his boat in Hurricane Hugo while in Puerto Rico. He is now working with Galveston Community Sailing to bring the life-time sport of sailing to the disabled and to develop Sea Scout Base, Galveston, into a U.S. Sailing Paralympic Sailing Center.

Topics discussed

- Early life
- Military brat
- Time at Texas A&M
- Favorite place to live when younger
- Childhood exposure to disabilities
- Shorty and scuba
- Beginnings of sailing
- Galveston and boats
- Places sailed
- Jenny
- Anegada Reef
- Marriage/ no kids
- Weather patterns
- POINT
- Sailing before and after accident
- Yearly Regatta
- Firearms
- Perspective

Fournier

This is Jason Fournier here interviewing once again Ken Carden for the UT-Arlington disability oral history project. Today's date is April 20, and I am at 1409 South Lamar in Dallas. I'm here today to talk with Ken about more disability, not necessarily history but talk about his personal life, what he is into, the disability community that he is involved with. Once again, thank you for participating in the university's oral history program.

Carden

You bet, thanks for having me.

Fournier

Thanks for having me as well. Last time I just dove into...[inaudible]. Let's get straight into what happened. I did not touch on your early life and how you grew up and everything else. For the audience, talk about your early life.

Carden

<topic>Early life</topic>

I was a military brat. My dad was a World War II vet and he got called back to Korea, and when he got called back he had finished his college degree back between World War II and Korea. When he got called back, he just decided to stay. He was in the Army Air Corps, he was in the Army and then the Army Air Corps and when they split it and made it Air Force; he basically spent my life traveling. I don't think we spent in any place more than three years.

Summer times, we would get dropped off in the woods with my grandparents and the folks would go traveling. My grandfather was a power plant engineer in Mount Home, Arkansas and then Branson, Missouri, and it was basically in the middle of nowhere in the Ozarks and we would run around in the woods all summer long, get ticks skinny dipping in the creeks, and fishing and hunting and all those kind of things.

Carden

<topic>Time at Texas A&M</topic>

My folks were in San Antonio when I finished high school and I applied to a whole bunch of colleges and got accepted to a whole and decided to go to Texas A&M. I went to A&M; I joined the Corps. I was in a company called Spider D. Spider D was to A & M what Faber College was to Animal House, to the extent that they even wrote us up my senior year.

That's pretty much it, had a great childhood, had great parents. I have to younger brothers; I couldn't ask for a better family.

Daddy always said, "Whatever you want to do, be the best you can at it, don't worry about making money, just go out and do it and the money will follow because you'll be good at it and happy doing it." I pretty much followed that example my whole life.

Fournier

That's good logic to live by. Sounds like you had a pretty normal childhood, little excitement of being a military brat. Where were you born? I know that you said you didn't spend more than maybe three years or so in a single place, but where were you born and where would you say that your favorite place to live that you can recall?

Carden

<topic>Favorite places to live when younger</topic>

I was born in Springfield well actually outside of Springfield, Missouri. We had a, my granddad had a family farm just outside the city limits and had no indoor plumbing; we had no indoor heating except wood. We were outside Mount Home, Arkansas, until I was about eight years old we didn't have indoor plumbing or heating, we used to have to go out pump the water out of the well. My grandma was extremely happy when grandpa finally ran electricity down to the power plant, put in an electric pump, ran water into the kitchen.

Fournier

How many years went by before the electricity was installed?

Carden

I was about eight; we lived there for six years. They moved down from Springfield, Missouri to Mount Home... then I don't remember how long it was before they moved to Branson but Branson we were a mile from the damn and we had five acres that backed up to a state forest that I never knew was a state forest, because I thought it all belonged to the folks. I worked with the Fulton General Store as a kid...that was great.

Favorite places? That's hard to say. It's like my daddy said, "If you're not having fun, quit and do something else." I enjoyed staying with the grandparents, fishing on Taneycomo or Table Rock Lake...any of the rivers, didn't have any supervision really. I don't know if there was a lot of places where I could be an abused kid now because I was allowed out on my own at a very young age.

Fournier

What river did you say by the dam?

Carden

If you went over Table Rock the river, I don't know what the river was named but it flowed into Taneycomo Lake below the dam.

Fournier

Do you know how to spell that?

Carden

Taneycomo?

Fournier

Yeah.

Carden

No, I'd have to look it up on a map.

Fournier

Guess I'll just spell it out phonetically.

Carden

Look at Table Rock Lake on a map and you'll see it, it's the one below that. It's the one that's right in the middle of Branson, Missouri.

Fournier

Ok...alright.

Carden

We used to run trout lines on there and catch catfish.

Fournier

Now, living in San Antonio you decided to go to A&M, join the Corps, was there really anything specific about A&M that just really...

Carden

<topic>Time at A&M</topic>

I got a degree in wildlife science and A&M was one of the few colleges that had that.

Fournier

What made you want to join the Corps?

Carden

I'd always been a military person, just like... I didn't even think of not going.

Fournier

Up until your accident while you were in the Army, you were how old when that happened?

Carden

Twenty-two

Fournier

Twenty two... up until that point in time, had you been exposed to anybody with any type of noticeable disability as a younger child or even as a younger adolescent? And if so, were there any preconceived notions that you were exposed to as well?

Carden

<topic>Childhood exposure to disabilities</topic>

Not really, my great grandmother was in a wheelchair and it was no big deal, I mean she was just in a wheelchair. It wasn't anything that anyone talked about, or thought about, or anything else. Even after I was in a chair I didn't really associate with other individuals in a wheelchair until I met a fellow named Shorty Powers. He ran an organization called Paraplegic On Independent Nature Trips (POINT).

Carden

<topic>Shorty and scuba</topic>

We were coming out of a little restaurant over here in Dallas called Celebration over on Lovers Lane. There was a fellow sitting in a van and he motioned me over, so I go over and he pulls out this leather binder book and he took my name down, didn't think much of it. The next time that I heard from Shorty, I was in the middle of trying a capital murder case against a fella named Billy Conn Gardner, who killed a Highland Park cafeteria worker. And my clerk comes out during the break and says, "Ken Ken there's this fellow on the phone named Shorty, he wants you to learn scuba diving and I think you should do it." I... that was a long trial, that trial went about six weeks.

I started to learn scuba diving over at the Bachman Lake Rec Center, through the whole program and the weekend that they were going to have the checkout dive, we had an argument on Monday morning so I stayed in Dallas to write my argument whether Billy Conn Gardener should not remain among the living here in Dallas. I didn't get checkout until I was living on the boat down in Georgetown in the Bahamas, but it didn't make a difference if you were living on a boat, no one cared. If you had your own equipment, they didn't ask... chuckles, they'd fill up your tanks.

Fournier

Two things that I definitely wanted to talk about this time was you being an avid sailor, you love the water, apparently love scuba diving as well. So, tell me how'd you get into it.

Carden

<topic>Beginnings of sailing</topic>

Well...when I was at A&M, which I was a freshman and I got transferred to Oshawa, Japan. I believe it was between my sophomore or junior year that I went over to Japan for the summer. I got a job as a lifeguard on a local beach; they had a yacht club right down the beach. I think they charged five dollars a month, after a week I was the... they made me chief lifeguard running the beach. They had some twenty- three-year-old motor pool sergeant that would've rather be up to his elbows in grease than working on the beach for the summer.

That made me happy, they paid me more, had to get up a little earlier, we had to drag the beach every morning try to turn over all the stuff, it wasn't a hard job at all. I just had to make a schedule and make sure people were there where they were supposed to be, make sure the stuff was checked in and checked out. I learned karate in Japan and went sailing. I went sailing a lot; when I came back to A&M we started a sailing club. We ended up having five international 420's in the Southeastern sailing circuit

and we'd get to go all over and race sailboats. We weren't very good, we didn't win, but we sure outpartied everybody.

I remember when we went, we used to go to New Orleans. One of my college buds in Animal Bay, a fellow named Jim St. John, his daddy had a Cal40 on Lake Pontchartrain. We'd go crash, we'd drive, it was a long drive. Go crash on the Lake Pontchartrain, we'd race sailboats all the next day and go into New Orleans and party all night and then drive home.

Fournier

That's a good life.

Carden

Good life, they had a, can't remember the fellows name but Tulane was one of the clubs we were racing against and they had the number one college racer in the nation. It wasn't even funny how bad he'd beat us; it was like we were step- children, we sure outpartied them though.

Fournier

You talking about him by himself or...

Carden

It would be a two man team. I think we took three teams and Rice was in there, University of Texas was in there, A&M, think one of the Florida schools was in there. Racing sailboats back in the late sixties wasn't a big thing.

Fournier

After your accident, you obviously haven't lost the passion for sailing...

Carden

<topic>Galveston and boats</topic>

Love to sail, need a boat. Actually I have...I work with a group in Galveston called Starbase. It's the... they built a fifty-five million dollar Paralympic Sailing Center. They have seven or eight sonars, which was the Olympic three person boat; Paralympic three person boat. Several big boats, they have a forty foot catamaran, and that's just a blast to sail. I had developed a seventy foot trimaran, that I built for a while because you can sit in one place in a bucket seat and two people can sit side by side and drive it with a joystick, all the lines reach back to there. You can drive it sitting in one place. It was a great little boat, still is a great little boat. You know how to make a small fortune building boat?

Fournier

I thought we had talked about this last time but my terrible memory...

Carden

Start with a large fortune... (both of us chuckle). I've probably put over \$150,000 into building boats and I've never come close to making a profit. I still have the molds; I still have a lot of the tools. I have some vacuum pumps, got some fiberglass, some poxy but their sitting in a storage compartment that I'm paying monthly on.

Fournier

It's an expensive hobby.

Carden

Yeah.

Fournier

What exactly is a catamaran?

Carden

Catamaran is boat with two hulls. Little boat I built was a trimaran, it had three hulls. If I ever go to sea again I'm going to go in a catamaran, want something at least at least forty four feet and probably less than sixty feet; somewhere in that range. The bigger your boat, if you build it correctly the faster you go.

The bigger the boat the harder it is to handle. If whatever boat I build, because I did sail by myself quite a lot in the five years that I did live on a boat, I wanna be able to sail it myself. I've designed it over andover and over again, in fact I've got plans for a fifty- six foot catamaran, I had a fellow named John Marbles whose one of the premier naval architects in building multi-hulls designed for me. I've got theplans; I just don't have \$750,000 to have a boat built.

Fournier

Just to have that kind of money to be able to build a boat that you'd love to sail on...

Carden

No, the thing about it is that everyone says that's an awful amount of money but it's basically a house. You're living on it and you're sailing around the world. The next time I go to sea, I don't want to owe anything on a boat, I want it completely paid off. The thing about a sailboat is... I'll tell you a story.

When I decided to move on a boat, I was married and we spent about four or five months taking a boat that was fairly stocked, coastal cruiser, turning it into an ocean dwelling sailboat. Building all the systems in, putting in a windlass that could raise your anchor. I had a forty-five pound CQR on a thirty four foot sailboat with a 120 feet of chain, when you put that hook down you didn't go anyplace, it stayed. We got ready to go and it had a little thirteen horsepower Yanmar diesel engine, the boat was a sailboat, it was meant to be sailed and not powered. You use the power to move you up and down in places. When we started offshore the first day and we found that we had a hull deck joint leak. The hull is the hull and the deck is the deck, it's like two pieces together. On the port side of the boat, it leaked. Instead of going across the gulf, which we started out to do, we came back in and we went up the intercostal waterway and went around to New Orleans, went around to Apalachicola and jumped down from Apalachicola and went down to St. Pete, where Irwin had its factory at the time. Took the boat in and get it fixed and most of that inside the intercostal you were just chugging around on diesel, you weren't sailing the boat a lot. You put up the main sail and motor sail if you could, if you had good wind. But you couldn't tack back and forth, you pretty much had to motor sail.

I went from Galveston to Nassau in the Bahamas and I filled up the diesel tank three times, and it was a forty gallon diesel tank. It wasn't like it was a huge amount of money to spend. The other thing is though the boat was setup with a generator on the engines so if you wanted to keep your batteries going and you weren't attached to a dock where you could hook up to electricity you had to power the boat and hooking up to docks is expensive, so we would sit down on the power of the hook and run the engines for an hour run the batteries up and take it from there. When I was back making a little money livin on the boat, we were down in Puerto Rico and I'd come back to make a little money and had a couple friends who were lawyers that had a Miami vice fifty-five foot whatever the heck that thing is, it was a fifty-five foot speedboat, I'll tell you it was unique. It was...it had a great big bed in the front with mirrors on the ceiling and it was a lot of fun, but what they said was we got this boat and we've got a captain on it that's in Fort Lauderdale.

The captain can drive the boat, but we're not exactly sure on his ability to navigate; would you mind taking this boat from Fort Lauderdale over to Nassau for us? I said "sure, we'll do that, you just get us a plane ticket back down to Puerto Rico where my boat was when we're finished." We flew into Florida and picked up the boat, they gave me an American Express card to take care of all the expenses, so we took the boat across to a little island in the Bimini's called Cat Key and we cleared customs. We stayed the night and we cleared there in Bimini, it's just easier because they don't have a lot of visitors. Cat key is a retirement community for old folks, the only gasoline vehicles they had was the fire engine and the garbage truck, everything else was little golf carts that they had hopped up and went all the island on.

Fournier

This is in the Bahamas?

Carden

This is in the Bahamas. Next day went around to Bimini and we filled it up with gas, \$750. The next night we partied in Bimini for a couple nights, we had a week and half before we had to be at Nassau. We partied a couple days and decided to take off the next day and we took...we went off Bimini and we around the Northside of Bimini and across the tongue of the ocean to a little bity island that's on right there on the other side of the tongue of the ocean between Nassau and Chub Cay. The little island called Chub Cay across the Bahama Banks, the Bahama Banks are interesting because they're not very deep. It's like going across a lot of sand and with coral heads sticking up; you got to be careful where you're driving so you don't run into anything. They put up markers so you just kind of drive in a big canal, only it's not a canal because there is water on all sides of you. We went across the bank and we filled with

gas, \$750. We pulled out of there, didn't want to stay at the dock because there wasn't anything at Chub Cay anyway, no reason to stay at the dock. You're out in a little bay and we anchored there and cooked dinner there on the little grill out on the back. I could see this front coming across and if we would've waited for the front to build up and come across, and we were going across the tongue of the ocean; we'd get beat to all kinds of snot. I said "alright let's go tonight," because by that time I'd been in and out of Nassau and I knew my way around and all you do is head kind of east until you pick up the lights, and there's all kind of lights on the horizon. You go until you see the entrance to the harbor, and the entrance of the harbor is marked by two light houses; one on each side. Except, one of them is out, so you have to know which one is out. You just kind of cheat to the Northside where you have real deep water until you pick up...and you just go into the ship channel and take it in to park the boat.

It was one of those nights that was just absolutely, it was like the calm before the storm? It was like glass. You're driving this fifty five foot whatever it was, it was a Miami vice boat; whatever kind that was was...power boat that's what it was. You're sitting there driving this thing and Diane my girlfriend was sitting out on the front with one foot on either side of the bow, and it's like glass, there's stars up above, it's beautiful. We get into Nassau, we drive by the tour boats and we take it right into Hurricane Harbor, it's on the north side on the Paradise Island side just after you go under the bridge, there's a little round harbor there. We parked the boat there, filled it up with gas the next morning...\$750.

We ended up partying in Nassau for several days until my friends showed up and then we got on a plane and went back to Fort Lauderdale and took another hop into San Juan and took a trip around to the Rosey Roads, Puerto Rico, picked up the boat and went sailing again.

Fournier

Just in gas alone y'all spent about \$2300?

Carden

Ya.

Fournier

Jesus

Carden

That's why I like sailing.

Fournier

(Chuckles)

Carden

Besides that I like the way they ride. I like to go fast and not hear engines going.

Fournier

They have a fairly shallow hull, don't they?

Carden

Catamaran's have... don't have a lot of draft, except the big racing catamarans have huge dagger boards that they can put down. Cruising cats tend to have a little bit of a keel because cruisers don't want to be messing with stuff. I want to be able to point the point as high as I can so I would have dagger boards.

I want to go as close to the wind as I can even though there was a fellow named Gary Hoyt that has an old saying that goes, "gentlemen don't beat", [beating is where 45 degrees this way 45 degrees that way] to get upwind. Gentlemen don't beat; always want to go off the wind. That's wonderful if it'll get you there sooner or later.

Fournier

It's interesting when you were talking about seeing all the stars and all the type of stuff when you're out there [sea]. I just think about my time out on a Navy ship and there were times where technically you weren't supposed to go out on the weather deck because especially when it's night out, it's absolutely pitch black outside, you cannot see a foot in front of you. You have to go out there when you're out to sea, just look up and see all the stars, it's a magnificent sight.

Carden

Mmhmm

Fournier

How far of a...I guess the Bahamas is the probably the main place that you sailed?

Carden

<topic> Places sailed </topic>

I sailed into the Virgin Islands and sailed all the way into Grenada. I sailed, the longest I was at sea was nine days and that was between...between...Georgetown and Anegada Reef. The reason we were nine days it was I was back in Dallas; seeing my folks right around Christmas and then I flew back into... I had friends down in Key Largo so went down to Key Largo, had a girlfriend named Rebecca down there. I had the boat, had left the boat in Georgetown, Bahamas after I flew home. Rebecca knew I was going to be going down to the Virgin Islands, and she says she has this friend of hers that is a sailor and he'd been to sea, she wanted him to go with me that was Chris. Chris had a girlfriend named Jenny.

Carden

<topic>Jenny</topic>

Jenny had told stories of what a great sailor she was. Jenny was like nineteen years old and we found out that Jenny's sailing experience was she lived up in Massachusetts and she worked for a boat yard, and her sailing experience was going out in a row boat and picking up boats off the [?] and bringing them in for whatever work that needed to be done, she wasn't a real great sailor. The other thing about Jenny was that she could not be quiet. She would either chatter, I mean she could be sitting there off watch reading and her foot would be [making smacking noise]. We used to say Jenny go to the front of the boat.

Fournier

She couldn't sit still...

Carden

<topic> Weather patterns </topic>

She could not sit still. That's another story, we left... go into Georgetown on a Saturday and we weren't going to leave for a couple days but there was a front coming through. When a front comes through normally what happens is the front comes down out of the North, what will happen is the wind will clock around from the South. When the winds clocking around from the South and you're going offshore into the ocean and you're going East, that's really good because you don't have to beat. Normally the headwinds come across Africa straight from the East right into your nose.

If you can catch that when it clocks around to the South, you're on the broad reach going straight the way you wanna go. It'll then clock around from the West and then it'll clock around from the North, when it clocks around from the North you're going like hell because you got a lot of wind and everything but you're still going straight east. Well... it kinda clocked around, when it clocked around we said "Damn we gotta get going."

We got on the boat; we went grocery shopping but there wasn't any diesel open so we only had like I think we had fifteen gallons of diesel. We head out, we're a day out and the wind dies, I mean it is nothing; we're sitting there on glass. We are wondering where that front is. We are drinking the beer, I've got a mini-fourteen, we're shooting beer cans off the back of the boat, we had a Navy destroyer come over and wave at us, we wave back.

We are sitting there bobbing like that for three days and we're not running the engine because we don't want to run out of diesel and we're only running for a couple hours a day to keep the batteries up. I guess that was about four days. The wind just comes like blazes out of the North and we are going like hell. We have two reefs down to the main, we have a storm jib up and you look and one side of the boat and the other side of the boat and all you see is water. We go up over the wave and then come down to the bottom of the wave, but we're cooking. We get to be, I don't know, that hull deck joint kinda opens up again. The batteries are on the port side under the quarter berth and they get flooded.

Fournier

Mmmm.

Carden

We have no electricity, we have no navigation because it's still overcast and we can't get a sun sight. We just know we're going east because we have a compass. I don't know about six days later I tell, five to six days later I figure we're figuring our boat speed and everything where we are, kind of making marks on the chart and I said, "Ok Chris wake me up at nine o'clock and we're gonna heave the boat to and wait till the morning because I know we're getting close to the Virgin Islands."

I crawl into the quarter berth and I go to sleep and the boat is going crunch, crunch, crunch. We found out it got a reef. In fact, you see this rock over here.

Fournier

I do. Is that the reef?

Carden

(indiscriminate talking while Ken is getting the piece of reef he has in his home to show me). When we went up to the reef, we turned the boat around to face the waves, get the anchor out; we're bouncing up and down on the reef. We take the cushions off of the inside of the boat, we take a bunch of line and we kind of put them between the boat and the reef. We didn't get any holes on it going in; we had no clue where we were. It was about nine and it took us about three to four hours to get us all wrapped up and settle down, then really had no clue where we were. We got up in the morning and we're looking around, we're wondering what we're going to do. I'm looking trying to figure out if I can take our dingy, which had a little four horsepower outboard on it, we're not going to a long way there and trying to figure up if I can take the spinnaker pole and make a sail out of it using the old storm jib, and around the corner of this yacht comes a group of three people.

They're a Swedish couple with their seventeen-year-old daughter that looked like she belonged in a Swedish bikini team. There looking for lobster, they come over and see up wrapped up on the reef and introduce themselves; we found we were on Anegada Reef.

Carden

<topic>Anegada Reef</topic>

The little island of Anegada is the top island of the British Virgin Islands and they don't, well back then they didn't let the bare boaters go up there because it's surrounded by reefs. They used to light fires to lure people onto the reef, they call em... the natives are all... you can find gold chains and everything on the natives because they're wreckers. They would bring people on the reef and they're still in there. I understand that there were some great sailors that landed on the reef, so I don't feel bad about it. We went on the reef Tuesday before Easter Sunday and we called some folks over from Tortola and tried to pull us off; did a horrible job. They wrapped a chain around my windlass and when they started to pull off, they jerked the windlass out of the boat.

We ended up being pulled off Anegada Reef by a boat named amazing grace on Good Friday. The problem was that we went on the reef at high tide and got pulled off the reef at low tide. We had to get off because there was another front coming in and we'd be nothing but fiberglass toothpicks all over the beach if we would've waited for the next storm.

When we got pulled off, it put a big hole; it just ripped the side out of the starboard side of the boat. Chris stayed on the boat; I was out on the dingy watching this whole thing. He was inside the boat and

he went down and he was stuffing the cushions into the hull of the boat to keep the water out. He had rigged three five inch pumps; water was going out as fast as it was going in. We got pulled into Tortola on Good Friday and we were the three white faces in a black church on Easter Sunday (both interviewer and interviewee laugh). We were sitting right there in the front row.

Fournier

That's amazing.

Carden

Yep.

Fournier

Now, what have you found... you said you first started having a love of sailing by the age of nineteen when you were in Japan. What have you found the differences being before and after your accident when it comes to sailing?

Carden

<topic> Sailing before and after accident </topic>

Can't hike. Hike is when you are on a racing boat or on a little dingy and you're leaning way back off the high side to keep the boat flat. I have to go to [inaudible] or bigger boats. I can't race dinghies anymore I turn them over.

Fournier

Is that the only obstacle you've ran into?

Carden

I imagine there are others. I don't race international 420's, I'd turn them over in a heartbeat.

Fournier

What are your goals... what are you wanting to do with the sailing club down in Galveston? The Paralympic...

Carden

<topic> Galveston </topic>

Oh, that's not me that's them. They setup the program that I always wanted to do. What I would like to do is I'd like to set up a yearly Regatta for paralyzed veterans. Get the paralyzed veteran chapters from

all over the United States to come down and race sailboats in Galveston. I've always thought the way you should do it... ugh... I've raced three of the disabled independence cups. The first one I was down in the islands, we were on St. Johns. I met a fellow named Tommy Kershaw, Tommy was a Vietnam Marine veteran who had both legs blown off and he was a carpenter that built boats and sailed, they called him Tommy Sealegs.

We were sitting in Red Beards Tavern in St. John drinking a few rum drinks and Red Beard had heard of this race that they were doing, a group called The National Ocean Access Project in Newport, Rhode Island. He comes over and buys us a round; we're all happily drinking rum drinks. Red Beard says, "Y'all outta go up there and race."

We all thought that was a great idea. I wonder what it would cost both Tommy and I were vets so we could fly Space A, I figured we could get us a room at the BOQ at whatever little base is up there. We had some friends, Jim St. John the fellow that I raced with at Texas A&M. He was running one of the big hotels right there on Saint John. The hotel kicked in some money and Red Beard kicked in some money and a few other people kicked in some money, we all went up there to represent the islands at the sailboat race. We made the finals and then I broke the gooseneck on the main sail and then we had to change boats. We went from the best boat to the one they held in reserve, and we came in third. If coming in second is like kissing your sister then coming in third is like kissing your ugly aunt, but we had a great time.

Fournier

(laughing) Oh my god.

Carden

But I raced in three of those, that one was the first they ever did. Then, we raced in two in Chicago at the Chicago Yacht Club. I've always thought what's the point of racing other people that are disabled, that's why I kinda built the boat I did the little trimaran. As long as you make it a rule you can't get out of your seat, it's completely level playing field. I've always thought the object outta be, is to try and integrate the disabled with the able-bodied population, get people out together. I've always thought we should do a one up one down race and call it the one pretty girl or one pretty boy race.

If you wanna say you're gay and race with another pretty guy I don't care, but do it one up one down and make it a family kind of thing. I'd really like to get that started down here.

Fournier

What do you think it will take to get started?

Carden

<topic>Galveston and sailing</topic>

The Doolins... Charles Doolin is a grandson of somebody that started Frito Lay, he and Rosemary who's his wife, put up the fifty-five million to build this facility and they're very much into disabled racing and Paralympic sailing and the Boy Scouts. There's a Boy Scouts thing down there, there's disabled sailing,

there's community sailing. I just need to get down there and we need to set it up. Going a little off topic even though it's not, the biggest problem I find with disabled folks is getting them off their ass to do stuff. By the way, I'm giving a talk next Friday, peer-to-peer talk at the VA if you wanna come in and watch, it's called to sail or not to sail.

Fournier

In Fort Worth or Dallas?

Carden

Right over here off Lancaster

Fournier

What part of the hospital?

Carden

It'll be in the spinal cord injury unit.

Fournier

Ok

Carden

The talk starts at noon. For some reason, they don't want me to talk about guns at the VA. Yeah, don't ask me, bureaucrats. I mean you have kids there that have just come back from Afghanistan shot and you're worried about talking about guns? Idiots.

Fournier

We'll leave that one alone.

Carden

Yeah

Fournier

You said you wanted to start up a yearly regatta for disabled vets, is it going to be the same thing as getting it started as being able to get down there? Or will it be a little more leg work to get this off the ground?

Carden

<topic> Yearly Regatta </topic>

Fortunately, I know a lot of people that are instrumental in running the paralyzed vets in different levels. I have a few contacts with the Paralympic sailing class and I think that if I just retired and went down there, I would have lots of time and make it happen. It's just a matter of putting in a lot of leg work. I think the VA would be very interested in it and I know U.S. sailing would be interested in it. I'm quite sure that Charles and Rosemary would give it 100 percent support. It's just a matter of go make it happen.

Fournier

Does A&M-Galveston have any kind of sailing team?

Carden

Oh yeah, A&M-Galveston is great. A&M-Galveston was actually was actually in the national championship a couple years ago. We've got a fellow down there who's the coach that is super sailor. He was a... getting a mind blank on the name right now...

Fournier

Jerry Coleman?

Carden

Jerry Coleman was a naval commander and he's just... his resume reads like you wouldn't believe. He's retired and he's a professor down there, he's the sailing coach an incredible sailor; incredible teacher. I traded him teaching him a little about guns and he's going to teach me how to race sailboats again.

Fournier

That's a fair trade.

Carden

Uh huh, since we got the... he's the coach of the A&M- Galveston sailing team, they're quite quite good.

Fournier

I was told to ask if there's anything about, if you knew anything about a program called Turning Point?

Carden

<topic> POINT </topic>
Yeah that's POINT.

Fournier

Okay that is POINT, alright. Just making sure.

Carden

Yeah, that's Shorty. Shorty had gotten an infection in his legs and had his legs cut off, he died a couple years ago. POINT is still operating; his wife Nancy is still running the program. Shorty was one of those people that was a driving force to keep things going, but he set it up in fairly good shape. We teach POINT, people out of their Lonestar PDA headquarters we teach license to carry. We did one about six weeks ago that was a combination of POINT and PDA, we had ten students. It's funny six of them were girls and six people in chairs they divided between boys and girls and the others rolled pods so we had a total of ten.

Fournier

POINT would be about involves shooting and it's not necessarily about the sailing correct?

Carden

POINT does...they're not a whole into shooting except they do shotgun shooting; they do all kinds of outdoor sports. They used to do annually a wheelchair extravaganza at Bauchman Lake and demonstrate all different kinds of sports. Everything from archery to air rifles to fishing to water skiing to sailing. They've had horseback riding, they've had fishing all right there in the same thing. They're not doing it this year because the City of Dallas has so many rules and regulations that they are looking around to find another place to do it to keep that going.

Fournier

How involved in POINT have you been recently or in the past?

Carden

I was there sailing program for a while. I hooked up them up with a local Hobi 15 catamaran club and they're the ones that do that now. I used to bring a little trimaran up from Tex Adaptive Aquatics and bring it up for the weekend and take people sailing but they have the catamarans there so I don't have to

do that anymore. I've been involved in that forever. Since I met Shorty, I've been on their board of directors, done legal work for them.

Fournier

You met Shorty in what year again?

Carden

I don't recall what year it was but if I went back and saw when I tried Billy Conn Gardener.

I guess we could run Billy Conn Gardner on Google and see when his trial was, that was in the late 60's? No, that was in the 70's. Ugh that's not right. I graduated law school in 1975, I worked in private practice for five years so I would've been in the District Attorney's office, somewhere between eighty and eighty-five, 1984 1985.

Fournier

I'm trying to look it up on Google right now, it's pulling it up. It says that he was convicted of killing Thelma Roe in eighty- three.

Carden

Okay, that's what it was. 1983 then Billy Conn Gardner. That was a fun trial, I used to fuck with Billy Conn Gardner.

Fournier

(chuckling) I remember you telling me about that. That was funny. Backing up just a smidge, you were married briefly?

Carden

<topic> Marriage </topic>

I was married and then we moved on the boat and always told Jill that we were going to move on the boat and go sailing and she loved to sail. She found out she hated to cruise. She absolutely hated it, the first day we went offshore she was terrified when she lost sight of land. We went back in, we had a leak anyway. Me and Jill and Boo Radley the cat, we went to Pensacola. We jumped off from Pensacola to go around to Saint Pete, that was an overnight trip.

Fournier

How long were y'all married for?

Carden

Oh, not quite a year.

Fournier

No kids?

Carden

...

[Looking through photo album describing people and places]

That's my bailiff and that's my clerk, hard job in the DA's office. We took a trip down to rent a boat in the Virgin Islands, Thanksgiving 1983.

The artful dodger, there's my ex...wait no that's his. That's Ryder Scott and Sally Scott, Ryder, Sally, Jill and I... there's Jill.

Fournier

She's a cutie.

Carden

Oh she was a cutie. We went sailing for a week in the Virgin Islands. There she is, there she is, there she is, there we are.

Fournier

No kids?

Carden

No. This is the boat I went sailing in; this is at the Hilton Hotel in Clear Lake.

We fixed the boat up, took it off and went sailing.

This is the Pina Colada Regatta, this was the Playboy boat. They had a big catamaran. The Pina Colada Regatta is from St. Thomas to Eus Van Dyke. What happens is before the season really starts and all the charter folks will take all the charter boats and have a general fun race from St. Thomas to Eus Van Dyke and party all night long. These were the folks that we bought the boat from so we got on their boat and did the charter thing.

I have a bunch of my old... when I was down in the Virgin Islands a bunch of the people from the DA's office all came down and went sailing with us. This is my number two, this is Jerry, Jerry went onto become the U.S. attorney in the DA's office.

Fournier

We have talked about in depth your stories of sailing, POINT, things going on in Galveston. One of the last things we definitely want to touch on is your love of firearms and how are you involved with either veterans or disabled community or disabled vets, is there anything specifically that you do with them?

Carden

<topic>Firearms</topic>

I teach license to carry. That's my...I teach girls and guys and girls in chairs. About six weeks ago, we had a class of ten; I think we've had about three of four classes now. I invite to come down to the range and expand knowledge beyond being able to pass the license to carry test which isn't a big deal. I think that I'm probably to end up writing a book on we'll call it the *Wheel of a Warrior's Society: How do You Carry a Gun When You're in a Chair?* Just different ways, different things, just make it another gun book. I think I have some perspective on that, I've met several folks now that are in chairs and shoot.

I met a fellow that was a Marine that had both of his legs blown off. Down at Eagle Lake we were doing a two day low light class and we ended up shooting from four to midnight every night. First day was pistol and second day was rifle.

First day, it was raining like hell. Can you imagine pushing a wheelchair through the mud for six hours? He had a Segway that was a sit Segway that was given to him by an organization called Segs4Vets, I think that's it. He had the great big wide wheels in the back, he could lean forward so he could keep both hands on his handgun and both hands on his rifle. He could lean forward, he could lean backwards, just by leaning which was he wanted to go.

I decided I wanted one of those after two days of being covered in mud and everything else. But, the program is only for vets from Afghanistan and Iraq. They're looking to expand it but I don't know when they will so I started looking on the internet finding out when I could pick one up, I figured I could get one in pretty good shape used and then put the chair on it for about \$8,000. That thing was just the cat's meow.

Fournier

How do you, how are you able or how do you have to adjust the way you shoot being in a chair?

Carden

The thing about teaching people with disabilities is you're gonna find a whole different level for every individual, every single individual will have different challenges. The higher up you are the less stability you have, it's like when I'm shooting a rifle I can't hold it way out here and drive the rifle from one side to the other, my injury level is T-5. You figure put your finger on your breastbone and from there down I'm paralyzed, so my ability to sit up is [inaudible]. When I'm shooting a pistol, I'm not pointing it, I'm not sitting square to the target and punching it out because I'll just keep going over and falling on my face. I use what's called, what a fellow named Paul Castle developed is called center axis reload. He was

a Brit. I spent a week at his house learning this system up in Tennessee. What he does is he teaches you to keep the gun in close and the front sight at reading distance pointed out like that with your arm, your driving arm directly behind so that the recoil is like this. If you're shooting right handed, you're shooting with your left eye but keep both eyes open. If you're going to do it the other way, you do the same thing you just shoot with your right eye while keeping both eyes open. Which has been very instrumental for me shooting around targets, being able to lean out like this and shoot around targets. There's no way to say this is you teach someone in a wheelchair because people have different abilities. It's like I was teaching a lady who just passed the license to carry, I spent a day with her. She was not quite a quad but she's in an electric wheelchair. There's some advantages and some disadvantages, but she could... the center axis relock system worked real very well for her because she brought everything in close, she could control it.

There was another guy who was a single amputee and a para, but he was a very low para. He could sit square to the target and just like you're standing up except he's sitting down, he could drive the gun out and he didn't have a lot of the issues. If you're going to carry a gun, how are you going to carry a gun? I'm a big believer of not carrying a gun on your chair, at least your primary gun. Frankly, the likelihood that anyone gets into a gun fight is pretty damn small if you're not in bad places.

There are three rules: don't do stupid things to stupid people in stupid places. You don't do those and you're going to be fine, you'll probably never need a gun in your life. In the event if you do, what's going to happen if you're in a wheelchair? You're going to get knocked out of that wheelchair and your gun is going to be over there and you're going to be knocked of the wheelchair over here. Carry a gun on your body, what problems does that raise? You'll have a skin breakdown and a pressure source, you're putting a hard source against your skin. You've got to develop systems to get away with that. For instance, for me I carry in an external holster right here in the area in front of the back thing, there's an empty space right there but I can carry in an external holster to where it's not really rubbing against me but it fits in that area. Different other people have different things. Our CEO for Lonestar PDA has been experimenting with belly bands. He was in the Air Force, then he was in the Army and then he was in Recon. He has taught guns all his life but he never picked it back up when he was in a wheelchair until I started teaching him how to carry.

Now he has jumped in with both feet. Everybody is different and you have to look at people and you have to have an open mind. Having seen a lot of different things that different people do, what worked for me and what doesn't work for me; gives me some insight how other people should carry and not carry. I can tell you right away there are some things you don't want to do. You don't want to put hard plastic holster inside the waist band holster up against your skin and pull your belt tight, you'll wear a hole through your skin real quick. There are some other, some of the newer holsters that put a pad between the holster and you. Stealth holster makes a pretty neat holster that my brother has a very soft surface right against the skin. It's all different issues. It's how you shoot, how you carry, how you access the gun, what kind of caliber you want to use. The less musculature you have the less caliber you want to use, less recoil. First rule of a gun fight, don't get into a gun fight. Second rule is if you do then bring a gun. That .22 in your pocket beats the hell out of the .45 on your nightstand.

Fournier

Absolutely. How long have you been teaching license to carry?

Carden

I don't know, since they've had it. 2015, so at least four years before that.

Fournier

2011?

Carden

Since about that I guess. That's been interesting, the changes in laws in the State of Texas. All the idiots out there talking about restricting people's second amendment rights because you have people that do bad things with guns. Well, what's happening in London right now? For the first time in history they've had more murders than New York City. So, what are they doing? They've already restricted everyone from carrying guns now no one can carry a knife that has a blade longer than three inches. They have knife restriction in London now.

Fournier

I guess this is getting a little off topic but wouldn't you have to do a better job of controlling immigration?

Carden

Oh yea, look at what's happening to Sweden. Sweden went from being a homogenous community that had no crime at all to one of the most crime ridden countries in Europe. People are leaving left and right because they took massive amounts of immigrants in that didn't comply with their culture and didn't want to become assimilated. It's not that bringing in immigrants is the problem, its bringing in immigrants that don't want to assimilate into your culture, that's the issue. You bring folks in that don't want to be Americans, Teddy Roosevelt said it in 1934 I believe, it's a crime to hold anything about an immigrants that want to be an American but if they say they're an American but something else they're not and they need to go back to the country they came from. You've got too many places in Europe with no- go zones, where people become insular in their culture that they brought with them and they don't want to change. Well, if they don't want to change go back. If you want to be an American, then be an American.

Fournier

There are so many rabbit holes we could go down with that one but we'll leave that one alone. Now, throughout the course that we have talked and we have gotten to know each other, I've gotten to know you as an individual can't help but love the spark and the love for life that you have. I think you said it best, it's about the attitude that you have...

Carden

If you're not having fun, then quit and do something else.

Fournier

When you look back when everything first happened to you, has there ever been a part of you going forward or going back to that day where you wish this didn't happen or is it something that you are grateful for because it taught you to appreciate other things? What has your mentality been?

Carden

<topic>Perspective</topic>

I wish it didn't happen. I'd love to be up chasing girls upstairs, running around doing what I used to do. It radically changed what I did with my life. Infantry officer ranger, instead I went to law school. The government rehabilitated me, the Army sent me to law school. There's a lot of things I'm not able to do that I wish I could, I can't dance worth a damn.

Fournier

Yeah but you can spin faster than anybody?

Carden

Yeah. Like I said, I can't chase pretty girls upstairs but if I have to chase them then that's too much work for me anyway. Things happen, get up and go forward.

I remember when we were sailing from my cousins house toward Apalachicola going down the Intercoastal Waterway, it was me and Jill and Boo Radley, were sailing down the Intercoastal on a beautiful day somewhere in the Florida panhandle. There were girls out on the beach in small bikinis and there was this apartment complex and there was a fellow in a wheelchair sitting on a balcony, looking down at the people on the beach and he looked like the most miserable creature I've ever seen in my life. I said what the hell are you doing, get your ass down there and have fun. You can sit around feeling sorry for yourself and it's not going to get you anything. Go out and have fun.

Fournier

It's like you said earlier today, it's about getting people in chairs off their ass and doing stuff. I think that can really apply to anybody. This has been an eye opening experience where life throws something at you, you start pissing and moaning. Look at what you have and then most of all regardless of what your status is as a person; make a difference. That's something talking with you lately, you're definitely doing that. Whether it be law, sailing, guns, that's something I feel you need to be applauded for and just keep doing what you're doing.

Carden

It's still fun.

Fournier

You gotta have fun with it and when it's not fun then you'll quit.

Carden

Quit and do something else, that's right.

Fournier

Definitely. Once again I do appreciate your time and we could go on for hours especially talking about the sailing aspect. I do appreciate you taking time out of your day and inviting into your home these last couple times and getting to know you and how you'll be able to make a difference in the disability community and what you'll keep doing going forward, so thank you.

Carden

You bet.

End of Interview