

Interview Transcript

Me: Feel free if you don't want to answer something just say pass or that you don't want to.

Her: Ok

Me: And for the record my name is Jennifer Burkhard and this is for the Economic Recession and the American Dream Project.

Me: ok So How long have you worked for the county?

Her: I have worked for the county for sixteen years. And my name is_____. And I have lived up here for almost 20 years now.

Me: What made you want to work for the county? How did you get into that?

Her: Well I was working at a children's emergency shelter called Casa Pacifica. But I lived in Santa Paula so it was quite a commute every day. And it was pretty much minimum wage. And so I was always kept my eyes open for something where I could advance. And I worked for several people including social workers who worked for the county. And they gave me some good ideas about applying with the county so I did. So I got a job. After a year at Casa Pacifica, I worked for um, the um, what was called PSSA. But it was really like children and family services and I worked in the food stamp section. As a data entry operator. So I filled out a lot of food stamp applications. So from there I worked my way up. I worked in that department for a year. Then I worked for behavioral health for a year. And then the Assessor's office for six years. And then resource management which I'm in now. But I also worked in the Executives office for a year. So I've been there and moved around and that's where I am at right now in the office of resource management.

Me: What do you enjoy about your current job?

Her: Well I am a management assistant for confidentials is what I am and I really enjoy working in a department that helps people get permits that are making sure that their houses are ok and not environmentally unsafe or unsafe to live in. And I work with environment health. So I feel like I am doing something good for the county. I'm in operations or the management area, so I see a lot of people, I help a lot of people. And because I have worked there for these years I have a good understanding of the workings of the government now. So it's really interesting to me. I enjoy my job a lot.

Me: How did the recession effect how we use our resources in Ventura County?

Her: Well I do know that we are very sensitive in Ventra County about growth in a direct manner. In other words, we have a lot of farm land and open area that we want to try and preserve as much as we can. We always take into....It seems like we want to make sure that we don't lose our resources in the wrong way or grow in the wrong way that could be bad for the environment. I think Ventra County is a

special place. We have beautiful coastline. We have mountains. We have everything we need here I feel. And we want to preserve it.

Me: And did the recession effect how we preserve it? Or the extent that we preserve it?

Her: I think it does. I think it makes us more conscious about using, wasting things such as water. You know, especially this year. We try and preserve our water. You know the cost of produce and the food at the grocery store has really gone up. So I know a lot of people are uh, doing their own vegetable gardens up here now. So I think the recession kind of brought that on. I also see more people aware of using public transportation rather than driving their own cars. There is a program every two years called rideshare survey where we have to let the county know how we commute and we try to find other alternatives to using our cars. I mean all of these things we are more aware of because of the recession.

Me: What problems in environmental management were occurring in Ventura during the recession?

Her: Boy that's a tough one I have to think about that one. Can you stop for just a second? Part of the things during the recession, we're trying to eliminate a lot of driving and carbon dioxide and pollution. And saving money. So in our county government, we have moved some of our offices to the east county near Semi Valley so that the residents there can get service and they don't have to drive all the way out to Ventra. So that's a big one and people are responding really well to that. Um I can give you a personal example of my daughter she'd have to commute sometimes from Santa Paula. So her Dad used to bring her in. Finally she, he had her take the bus because it saved gas and it was a better way to go. I have noticed that since the recession there have been a lot more farmers markets pop up in the area. Which saves kind of the middle man and marketing so that saves money. And the food is grown in this area, I think that benefits us so much more and saves money again. It's really a lot of money issues. I have noticed there are a lot of homeless people here but we're trying to make that better. Since the recession I just see more and more people not having enough money. And hopefully that will improve.

Me: Where do you think the recession hit hardest in Ventura County?

Her: Um.. Well the housing market was hit really hard. And there's certain parts of Ventura and Oxnard. I think Camarillo is doing ok. And I think the east side is doing ok. I see it more in Ventura/Oxnard area. And I am not sure why. And even in the county, the county where I work, we don't have any cost of living increases. We haven't had for five or six years now. So its effected even me. We have to say our money a little more and make our money go farther now. Cause the cost of livings gone up yet our income has stayed the same.

Me: As the recession comes to an end, do you think that we will change how we use the resources? Like water, oil?

Her: Yes cause we have to. Cause our population is growing. We have limited resources and we're having a drought right now. So even in the paper today it was talking about it's a way of life. People shouldn't just preserve water when its dry but they should do it all the time, so that we have a reserve. Now what else where you asking about? The future an d if it's affected us? With natural resources being

the way they are I see more people interested in solar energy because once you make that purchase of the solar panels it's expensive but in the long run saves money. I'm not there yet. But I see that happening because of the recession. I see people watching their coins, you know, not going on as many vacations far away, thinking about college for their children. And having to really save so I think that's gonna be a big change. I think more entertainment and activity will be centered around where you live rather than drive somewhere. What else..... I think there are a lot of animals kind of going on the endangered list. So we're really making efforts in that area for the animals to thrive. And I think there is going to be more of that. Especially in the water and the whales.

Me: So now that the recessions starting to be over you think there will be an increase in preservation?

Her: I think so. I think so because people are more aware of what they can lose now. You know, they are more sensitive to things that are around them. And becoming more aware of nature. The importance of it. So its going to cost us more if we cut down our trees. It's going to cost us more if we lose an endangered species. You know, this is my hope anyway. I think the recession has given everybody a new outlook on what is important in life and simplifying their lives as much as possible.

Me: What signs do you see that change in outlook happened because of the recession?

Her: I see more housing that's going up. They are doing a lot of low income opportunities for people in the downtown areas. They are building, I don't know if its completed yet, but they're building some lower income housing. So maybe that's just going to be a future having people live more in town. Smaller cars. People are driving more economical cars. I don't see as many SUVs as there used to be. More people riding on trains, and rapid transit. Busses, bicycles.

Me: And so going forward you think because the recession made us aware of these things that the public transit is something we are going to be making an investment toward?

Her: I'm thinking there is a big opportunity for more rapid transit now because people can't afford the gas. So yeah I think it's gonna go that way.

Me: You and your coworkers must have dealt with a lot of people effected by the recession. What in general do you think the recession as changed?

Her: Its changed the way we work so we can save money and do things faster and help the public more. We have a program it's called the Lean Sigma. What it is is a program throughout the county to try and streamline their business. So when someone comes in for a permit, instead of having 70 things they have to do, and different deparment they have to go to, we have eliminated a lot of the paper and the time and its much easier to come in and get your permit. And that means for the people who come in they don't have to spend as much time or money. And that's a big thing in the county now-getting rid of the excess. We watch....more work is online now. We are trying to eliminate paper cause that saves a lot of money too. So that's a big thing in our county-is finding efficiency in everything we do. And that's a

definite result of the recession. And I think its not going to stop. We are going to continue that way, in that direction. And its good.

Me: So in your opinion, this is all your opinion, What do you think the American dream is?

Her: The American Dream. Wow that's a big ones. Ok I would say it kinda goes back to why people came her in the first place-freedom for education, freedom for whatever religion that they want. And opportunity to.... Opportunities for careers that you want to be in rather than forced into cause you can't help it nothing else is out there. That there is enough food to go around. That's a big thing. I didn't even mention there are a lot of kids out there who don't get a good breakfast, lunch, or dinner. That's why we have a food share program down here. So medicine for everybody and uh the American Dream. And no war! (small giggle). And I don't know. Is that the American Dream? I'm just telling you things that I think make a good life. I'm sure I am missing something. And that our children are healthy and that they have opportunities. Not just me. I mean I feel fortunate. I have had a lot of opportunities and I have had to work hard. But I want to make sure my kids do too. And that they are going to get what they want. That's really big for me. That they are going to be smart and that there won't be another recession.

Me: Do you believe that what the American Dream sort of is has changed at all because of the recession? That maybe it's more out of reach? Or maybe it's more....

Her: I think our mentality has changed. I think back in the 80s and 90s people were really money hungry. I think it was a big thing almost a power trip to see how much they could make. I remember going back to my high school reunions and people bragging always bragging about 'Im this' 'Im that' or 'I made a million bucks'. And I don't, I think it's changed now. People want to grow their own vegetables. They want to be self-sufficient more. Or rely so much on other people if they want to survive. They can have a nice community where people can help each other. So it's more simple. I think it's more simple. Maybe I am looking at it an odd way. But we've been through so much. We've been through a lot of hard times that hopefully our lives will simplify. We don't need as much and we can be happy. And so money won't buy you happiness. The thought that there is more in life than money. That we can be happy and our children will feel that way too. I don't know though. I know a lot kids that are ambitious. It's still a big thing. I don't know what to tell you on that.

Me: mentioned how the county has a food share program. What can you tell me about that?

Her: Well food share and I'm not really sure where they are centered, but they put out barrels everywhere. We have them in the government center. There is a campaign going on right now for it. They also email. They have news going out through email and stuff-for donations. They also have programs within food share where sometimes the food is just grown for food share and other people cant have it. It goes to schools. It goes to the elderly places. So its distributed, drivers who just take it everywhere. There are drop off places and there's distribution. So it's a really good program. And if you don't have food to donate then donate money and they'll buy the food. I think they even have their own gardens now. So that's getting bigger and bigger.

Me: So do you think that the growth in that program is the result of an increased need in Ventura County?

Her: That's a good point. I think there is. I think there is an increase in need. Um because there are more campaigns than I have seen in the past. So that just sort of tells me that out there people need help. And I have heard mentions of senior citizens. There are more old people than there was in the past. An increase in senior citizens, including me. (small chuckle) And they need help sometimes. They can't get out as well and work. You know so that's probably one of the biggest places that food share is helping. Does that answer your question?

Me: Yes

Her: Good

Me: So seeing as how you're in the environmental department um what sort of businesses that use the resources, that use our natural resources have grown or shrunk in the recession?

Her: Hmm.... One thing that comes to mind are the farms. You know it's probably recession related, that there's, they don't have as much manpower anymore. Cause there is a lot of regulation about illegal immigrants. Cause that's changing now. There is programs coming up and that a problem that could be part of the recession now. Cause they used to be able to get cheaper labor. But since that not as easy. And also it's a little harder, um farmers have to provide insurance now so that takes a big bunch of money to make sure that all of their workers are covered. It's a big expense. And land is really at a premium now. Land for farmers to expand is really really expensive. This is part of the program I listened in on last week. And their equipment is getting older. A lot of farmers are having a hard time making ends meet. And also lack of water. Um they have to keep up with growth and with what we need in food but they have to put out a lot of money for their business to continue. And I think the recession had a lot to do with that. And I think everything's expensive now. And the insurance part too. If you go out of this country its much cheaper to produce food. There is no insurance. This is what they told me. In Mexico for instance um the labor is cheaper, there's no insurance plans and all that. But we want to keep it here. We want in in our county and our community to grow and prosper. So it takes a little money to do that.

Me: And the recession has.....?

Her: Yeah and again the recession has hurt a lot of farmers. So with the price of land mostly. Land and labor and all that.

Me: And um.. I heard that there was some talk of doing fracking in Ventra County.

Her: Oh yes I am glad you mentioned that. Well frackings been going on for a long long time. But recently is when people have begun to think about it a little more and worried about if this is going to hurt our environment. Because there's, they shoot chemicals and they are afraid that it is going to pollute the ground-water. And I listened in on another educational program about fracking. It sounded like its not something dangerous like what people are thinking. They were talking about all the different

measures they take to prevent horrible things from happening, and I am not really sure now. But it is still in discussion. We probably will be having more fracking I think in this county.

Me: And that's an effort to bring jobs into the county that were taken by the recession?

Her: I don't know enough about the subject. But yeah I think it's an effort to... Yeah it would probably bring more. And I am think the technology required to get to that oil. You know what fracking is?

Me: Yes

Her: Yeah and they have to drill sideways and get through that.. what is its...shale? So yeah its going to take new technology so it could bring in more scientists I'm thinking, Scientists and workers who create the lines. And yeah it could bring in more. The recession. Yeah people that are out of work right now, maybe that will give them more opportunities and jobs. I don't know the unemployment. Do you percentage of people out of work?

Me: Not in Ventura County.

Her: I think it's about 9%. My roundabout way of answering your question is yes I think it will bring more jobs to the county.

Me: What else do you think is important about the recession experiences of people in Ventura County?

Her: Um I think it's, we have been through a real traumatic time. I think people become more frugal. At least I have. More conscious of not throwing away food. Not letting the water run too long on the lawn. Hah I lost track of what your question was.

Me: What do you think is important about the recession experiences of people in Ventura County?

Her: Yeah so we have been through it. We are coming out of it. Maybe we learned from our mistakes. And hopefully it won't happen again. I think the number one thing kids are talking about in school is uh how to improve the quality of our life here and not. You know there is more ways that just going to the stock market buying stock and all that. That there is a new way of life. And yeah I think it is a shocking experience and we need to watch our dollars and we need to put more money away for rainy days. Just like in the 1930s with our grandparents and the recession its very similar.

Me: So maybe the lessons that we learning aren't exactly new lessons but old lessons?

Her: Both. I think there are old lessons on greed. I think certain instiutions were greedy-the real estate market and banks. And that's an old lesson. I think new lessons are that we live in a faster society. There is so much more technology. TV, radio, I phones things can happen faster. So we really need to use our critical thinking so we're not hurting our environment, our air. You know the list goes on and on. The recession can effect everything.

Me: Including the environment?

Her: Including the environment yes. So lesson learned. Hopefully.

Me: Anything else you want to add?

Her: You're a very good interviewer. You asked some questions that I had forgot about. No I don't really have anything to add. I feel hopeful we learn from our mistakes.