



STEPHEN BEERS

Save Barton Creek Association

1990s-Present

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Our movement is not yet ready to be memorialized or mythologized “for the record.” However, because of the very human desire to produce a tidy narrative, there is a temptation to call things over and done. We can celebrate every day that we can still enjoy our natural treasures, but we can never take them for granted.”

These days, there’s a hunger for a good narrative tale—for an inspiring “story” to share.

There’s trends for literary memoirs, for personal confessions shared on national TV, private stories aired on public radio, weekly storytelling contests staged in large metropolitan area bars and theaters.

Marketing consultants craft biographies for client corporations, rather than directly pitching products. Politicians tell a focus group-tested, mythical origin story to better appeal to voters.

Postmodern intellectuals eagerly debunk and deconstruct the dominant discourse, saying that no one’s story is ever genuinely ‘objective.’ Scholars suggest telling a new feminist ‘herstory’ to replace the old patriarchal “his-story.”

Self-help gurus and mystics tell us we “make our own reality”—and if we don’t like one story, well then, can’t we just pick another?

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And in an alleged post-truth world of “fake news,” there’s many who just don’t know who or what stories to believe any more. Are there any “true stories” left?

I was asked to tell my story about ongoing involvement with organizations like Save Barton Creek Association—I presently serve on their board—or of my longer association with groups and causes like the SOS movement and Sierra Club.

However, these days, when I think of Barton Springs and Barton Creek, I see these beloved places from inside a fragmented kaleidoscope of images and feelings—rather than anything one can summarize by neat stories with a beginning, middle, and end.

Dancing sunlight on shimmering water. Cool relief for a scorching summer. Steam rising off the water on a winter’s day. Laughter and splashing sounds. People of all ages, shapes, sizes, and shades. Graceful glides and awkward cannonballs.

And all the other Barton pool patrons and residents: ducks, cormorants, turtles, eels, snakes, fish. A startling clarity and a beauty that at odd, unexpected times still can suddenly reach up and grab you by the throat.

This may be the only natural spring-fed swimming hole within sight of a major downtown anywhere in North America, perhaps in the world. An island of serenity and a respite from the madding crowd. Unique, singular.

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I think too of the bustle along the Barton creek greenbelt upstream, where all the larger mammals hang out—deer, possums, raccoons, foxes, armadillos, people. And to think that all of this still exists within the confines of the most rapidly growing city in the nation.

What an everyday miracle.

Well, we all have our stories.

Stories are a primary way to understand ourselves and our world. They are meant to be entertaining, and sometimes enlightening.

Considering the narrative elements for a good story arc—conflict, heroes, a happy ending—I find today I cannot make an easy summation of our struggles to save these special places since the uprising against Freeport McMoran's plans way back in 1990.

If we stopped the clock back in 1992 with the overwhelming passage of the SOS ordinance by referendum, then the last act of our movie is auspicious; we can rest easy and live happily ever after. The good citizens of Austin triumphed over the evil forces of ecological destruction.

Unfortunately, it hasn't altogether turned out that way. Not yet anyway.

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As I write these words, Kinder Morgan Corp wants to build a natural gas pipeline across the Edwards Aquifer. The towns of Blanco and Dripping Springs, as well as private developer Sawyer Cleveland Partners, plan to dump treated sewage into streams that feed Barton Springs. Our state's transportation agency is readying construction of giant twelve-lane wide superhighways on the aquifer recharge zone.

We are busy reaching out to affected people both in Austin and—elsewhere in Texas. I think we can win these battles, the most rigorous challenges we have yet faced—but it won't happen without a much larger, more empowered and effective people's movement than we've ever known before.

Our movement is not yet ready to be memorialized or mythologized “for the record.” However, because of the very human desire to produce a tidy narrative, there is a temptation to call things over and done.

We can celebrate every day that we can still enjoy our natural treasures, but we can never take them for granted.

Thirty years on, the last chapter of this story is yet to be written.

I was at the all-night hearing; worked hard on the subsequent SOS referendum, electing the “green” council, Prop. 2 preserve lands (in multiple bond elections) and BCCP.

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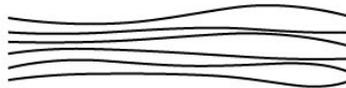
We've been on defense ever since. I could go on and on with that—Stratus and Bradley deals, LCRA water pipeline, Lowe's and Walmart, SH 45 and JPI, the "Parke", AMD, Rockcreek, Cypress etc. etc.,. but I just don't know what's important to mention for posterity.

I think that post heroic story is rather dreary and uninspiring. We've had some scattered successes relative to things being even worse, but it's been a bit of a grind.

Some of these forced compromises helped—so it wasn't a total loss. I feel we made some difference there in each of those situations, but we were outgunned pretty badly

I take some solace in the damage control accomplished but these incidents don't make for gripping history. I think the details of those cases are and will remain obscure.

BARTON CREEK



TIME STREAM