

NARRATOR INTRO

Welcome to the Talking Book Voices, the podcast where we explore the wonders of the Texas Talking Book Program. Join us in making literature accessible to all. This program, a division of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission provides a free library service to Texans of all ages with a qualifying visual, physical or reading disability. Each episode will uncover its history, share stories, get updates and tips to maximize this invaluable program. So, whether you love reading, seeking accessible materials, or just curious about the program this podcast is for you. Visit www.texastalkingbooks.org for more info. So, let's begin the Talking Book Voices, a podcast by the Texas State library and Archives Commission.

JACLYN

Welcome to another episode of the Talking Book Voices podcast, where we bring you stories and voices that make a difference. We're kicking off this episode as we prepare for National Volunteer Week later this month. We'll recognize the contributions of our very own studio volunteers. We'll delving into this world through the eyes and voice of one of our volunteer narrators, John Kaufman, exploring why volunteering for him is not just an act, but a way of life. Learn about John, his experiences, insights, and the profound impact volunteering has had on his journey.

JOHN

Hello, my name is John Coffman. I am a narrator right now for the talking book program here in Austin. I've been doing this off and on since 1994, maybe 92. I don't know, something like that. My current role, as I said, I'm a narrator. I started, I think, as most people do, as a monitor. I have been a reviewer off and on. I like being a reviewer. I love listening to other people record, as well. I said off and on, because my career has caused me to move around quite a bit. So, as I have been, whenever I have been in Austin, I have tried to come down here and work with Talking Book program here, in Austin. But I also lived in Phoenix for a while and found out that there was a talking book program in Phoenix, and so I recorded for several years there. We were in Phoenix for about five years, and I believe I recorded there the entire time that I was in Phoenix.

I really enjoyed it. The reason that I got into working with the Talking Book program is that really, ever since puberty, I guess people have said that I should be doing something with my voice. Originally, people said that I should be on radio, which I was always flattered by. I love listening to the radio. But my career was in construction, and I love construction more than I wanted to do anything with my voice, so I just continued on with construction. Then one Sunday morning, I was reading the newspaper here in Austin, the Austin American Statesman, and there was an article about the Talking Book Program. In that article, it said that they were needing volunteers, so I decided I'd give them a call and see if they wanted to check out my voice. I came down and talked to the volunteer coordinator and she said yes, they could use

me. I started out, as I said, as a monitor. I did that for just a couple of weeks, not very long at all. When she came to me and asked if I would record a special recording that they needed done and they would consider that my audition. So, I said, sure, I did that. They considered it my audition, and I started recording right off the bat. Um, so I've been recording for the Talking Book Program from very shortly after I started. I continued to monitor, though, for one of the longtime narrators. As much as anything, I wanted to keep monitoring just so I could learn from him how he reads. So that's what I did. The first book that I did was on the history of the American Indian in Texas. I don't know if that book is still around. I when I think about it, I can only imagine how horrible I must have been at it. I can't imagine how bad it would have been, but I got through it, got it done, moved on to my next book. The book that I am recording now is *The Mystery of the Mysteries*, I guess *The Mysteries of the Magnolia Hotel*. Really good book. Very good book. I have been blessed, honestly, with a series of really good books. I've really enjoyed some very good books that I have recorded. Some of the books that I've recorded have not been so good. One in particular that I won't tell you about but talk to you about. But at the same time, I've had some very good books.

What is it like to record a book? One of the other reasons, I guess, that I came to the Talking Book Program is that I love to read. I have always loved to read. And so, to be able to read and enjoy what I'm doing. Also, I love to tell stories. So, to read and record a book.

The way I see it is I am telling a story for an author. I'm trying to make it so that someone listening to a recording, is able to imagine that they are listening to the voice of the author so that it's really, it's just somebody telling a story. That's what I try to do. I try to put my voice in place of the author. So, I take the author's words and tell their story for them. So that's what I do. That's what I try to do. I hope it comes across that way. That's always my goal.

What is my favorite line from a book that I've recorded? I don't know that I could come up with a favorite line specifically, but I think my favorite book is by Gary Cartwright. The book was called *The Best I Recall*.

Gary Cartwright was a fantastic storyteller. He had a career that went all the way from early days in Dallas and Houston. I believe back he was in Dallas. As a matter of fact, when John Kennedy was assassinated, he worked for Texas Monthly. He was a publisher. He was a fantastic storyteller. And he could weave words together better than just about anything, anyone that I can think of. I loved his book. It was a fantastic author. So, if you get a chance to read or listen to that book, I would encourage you to do so. Very, very good book.

What do I hope patrons get from hearing a book that I recorded? This answer goes back to a volunteer appreciation dinner that we had while I was working for the Talking Book Program in Phoenix.

Every year we have volunteer appreciation dinners, and each year we have a speaker. Sometimes that'll be an author, maybe a publisher, maybe someone else from the publishing

business. There may be another volunteer, an administrator from the program. There will be different speakers that we have that particular year. The speaker was a patron relatively well compared to me. He was a relatively young man. He was in his late 30s, early 40s, something like that. He had lost his sight when he was 12 years old. And he explained what it was like to learn to live unsighted. And how important the Talking Book Program was to him as an uncited, newly uncited person, and how he had learned about the Talking Book Program. And had started as a patron of the program very early. It was still a patron at that point in his life. And what he said was, and this will always stick with me. He said that he could put a tape in the machine and escape the darkness for a few hours.

“Escape the darkness for a few hours.” That's all it takes for me. Those words have stuck with me ever since then, and those words motivate me, every time I come into the library. Every time I come in here and sit down and start to read, I thin, “escape the darkness for a few hours,” I think about that guy and how if my voice and if my abilities to read and tell someone else's story. And helped someone else “escape the darkness for a few hours”. I cannot imagine anything better to do with my time than that. So that's what I do. And I will continue to do this, for as long as I have a voice.

And I think that's what I'm supposed to do, because one of the odd things about this is that I have had a number of surgeries on my neck and throat and upper chest. I have five, as a matter of fact. And each one of those, the surgeons have told me that I would probably not have a voice when they were done. I've also had three radiation treatments that were supposed to take my voice.

And my voice doesn't sound like it did, but most people who've known me for years say they can't tell the difference. I know how it feels different. But I've always amazed the doctors that I can still speak. My left vocal cord is 60% paralyzed and yet I have never lost my voice. So eventually I'm supposed to keep talking. That's what I'm supposed to do. And if I'm supposed to keep talking and there are people who still need to “escape the darkness for a few hours,” I guess I will continue to come in here as often as I can. And sit here in this little room, read other people's books and tell other people's stories. That's what I do.

JACLYN

Well, that concludes this episode of the Talking Book Voices, spotlighting the impactful power of volunteering. If you're interested in becoming a volunteer for the Talking Book Program, there are three positions available. The reviewer, the monitor, and the narrator. Volunteers work under the guidance of studio staff to produce books and digital magazines in digital audio format, and a new volunteer can work as either a reviewer or a monitor. To learn more, visit our website at www.texastalkingbooks.org and click on volunteer. Your time as a studio volunteer can make a difference to the multitude of patrons who love the Talking Book program. Thank you for tuning in and until next time, remember the gift of your time and dedication can truly change lives.

Bye.