

1992

UA37/21/2 Research Interview

William Jenkins

Suzanne Hansen

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Western Kentucky University
UA37/21 William Jenkins Faculty / Staff Papers
Item 2 Suzanne Hansen Interview

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Description: Research interview with Suzanne Hansen owner-operator of Recycled Revolution. The tape has quite a lot of background noise which occasionally make it difficult to hear what is being said.

For more information regarding Recycled Revolution see:

Apodaca, Rose. New-Age Junkies, Los Angeles Times, 4/23/1993.

Kelly, John. Bowling Green Firm Turns Old Junk Into Fashion, Kentucky News Era, 11/1/1993 - <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=266&dat=19931101&id=AtorAAAIBA&sjid=W2QFAAAAIBA&pg=6258,162030>

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Oral History Recording List

UA37.21.2 ~ Audiocassette

09/25/2014

Media ID	Side	Start time	Subject
Tape 1	1	00:00:00	<p><i>SH: . . . myself and Jorge Hansen who is now my husband but we met about four years ago in California, in Hollywood. And he and I had a lot in common and about three weeks after we met we came up with this idea Recycled Revolution to . . .</i></p> <p><i>WJ: Now why were you there in the first place?</i></p> <p><i>SH: I had a job and they moved me from Atlanta. And I was a sweater designer and I designed sweaters for a company out there and I did that for a little while. I did a couple other things too. I started doing some things on my own which involve recycling blue jeans. So I was kind of into recycling anyway before I met Jorge. They had moved me to California so I was there.</i></p> <p><i>And at the time I met Jorge I was kind of getting out of doing the recycling of the jeans I had a partner in that and he was my boyfriend at the time and we kind of went our separate ways. And I was looking for something to do also and so was Jorge. Jorge had come out from New York. He had just moved out from New York to do, he was going to get into acting and he had done commercials. But when we started Recycle Revolution he got out of that and we both just focused on that, on the project.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:01:55	<p><i>WJ: And did you start this in California?</i></p> <p><i>SH: We were out there until a year ago. So we were in California for three years doing it.</i></p> <p><i>WJ: What brought you back to Bowling Green?</i></p> <p><i>SH: Well I'm from here . . .</i></p> <p><i>WJ: And your mother's Martha Deputy.</i></p> <p><i>SH: My mother's Martha Deputy, yes. And kind of home is where the heart is so we ended up moving back here. And he didn't mind moving and it's pretty and everything. The only question he had was "You didn't tell me quite about the weather." I kind of forgot. I had been gone so long I had forgot about the humidity and one weather crisis or another, but we moved back.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:02:38	<p><i>WJ: So you came here and now you are in an old building . . .</i></p> <p><i>SH: Yes.</i></p> <p><i>WJ: . . . which used to be an electronics . . .</i></p> <p><i>SH: Yes.</i></p> <p><i>WJ: . . . supply company.</i></p> <p><i>SH: Yes.</i></p> <p><i>WJ: How did you finance it?</i></p> <p><i>SH: We've just been financing it on our own.</i></p> <p><i>WJ: No bank loans?</i></p> <p><i>SH: Except to buy the building.</i></p> <p><i>WJ: You bought the building.</i></p> <p><i>SH: We bought the building. When we moved here we wanted to buy something instead of renting and renting and renting. And we had bank financing for that. But until now we've not had any financing outside, except for that.</i></p>
Tape 1	1	00:03:19	<p><i>WJ: Now you make a great many items . . .</i></p> <p><i>SH: Yes.</i></p> <p><i>WJ: . . . out of trunk inner tubes.</i></p> <p><i>SH: Trunk inner tubes. Hub caps.</i></p> <p><i>WJ: Hub caps.</i></p> <p><i>SH: License plates.</i></p>

Media ID	Side	Start time	Subject
			<p>WJ: <i>Bottle caps.</i></p> <p>SH: <i>Bottle caps. Records. Seat belt buckles. Old blue jeans. We still use old blue jeans. Let's see what else we use. I think we hit on most of the things. We always look for new things to incorporate, but of course you have to be able to get a lot of it. And right now we are focusing on making backpacks and purses and belts. And we've not really gone out of that focus because then your production gets everywhere. So we've stayed in fashion items, very, we make them well and what not, but they're not like a . . .</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>You call them fashion items.</i></p> <p>SH: <i>Yes.</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>Fashion for whom?</i></p> <p>SH: <i>Fashion for anybody. Fashion for, we've focused mainly ourselves on the east coast and the west coast and then out of the country. They sell in high fashion boutiques and higher end and when I mean higher end I mean higher price fashion stores. Magazines come in and use it in their maybe an editorial it's a fashion. You said, "Fashion in what sense?" It's not a generic. It's very noticeable when you wear it. It's very much a fashion statement when you wear it. It's very noticeable, flashy how fashion can be.</i></p>

Tape 1	1	00:05:15	<p>WJ: <i>You say on your map up there that you have sales east coast, west coast, Key West or thereabouts.</i></p> <p>SH: <i>Yes.</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>And Florida.</i></p> <p>SH: <i>Well we've missed a few dots up there. I think we used our dots for something else.</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>Yes.</i></p> <p>SH: <i>But what you see, yes, we're in probably forty different states across the country.</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>Now in the foreign countries where you sell well . . .</i></p> <p>SH: <i>Japan.</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>. . . where are those?</i></p> <p>SH: <i>Japan . . .</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>Japan?</i></p> <p>SH: <i>. . . has always been our number one foreign export.</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>No kidding?</i></p> <p>SH: <i>Yes.</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>You're trying to redress the imbalance of trade.</i></p> <p>SH: <i>Of course.</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>But I'm surprised that you sell so well in Japan.</i></p> <p>SH: <i>Well all of our products are made up of very Americana, you know a hub cap that says Ford on it or Chevy and they like Americans so much. License plates we use all fifty states and they like the license plates. It's so noticeable American. The belt buckles say GM on them and they like that. They like American products and so when we put them all together and make a bag it's a very unique, special bag.</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>That it is. Now looking over at the map I see you've got Holland on there.</i></p> <p>SH: <i>Yes.</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>And Germany.</i></p> <p>SH: <i>Holland, Germany.</i></p> <p>WJ: <i>Austria, no it's not Austria, no it's Italy, isn't it.</i></p> <p>SH: <i>It's Switzerland, Switzerland. Italy. We're in Canada, Singapore, Korea, Australia. And we shipped to a lot of other countries. We've even shipped to South Africa, Scotland. Let me see, where else? We're getting ready to talk about going into the Middle East with a person that has connections.</i></p>
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Media ID	Side	Start time	Subject
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WJ: Well don't send them beer caps.

SH: Why?

WJ: Well to the Muslim countries?

SH: Oh, they won't know what to do with it. But this will be for the more fashionable Muslims. This won't be for their very their veiled Muslims. This will be for their fashion Muslims.

Tape 1 1 00:07:51

WJ: It's a fascinating thing you've done. And what percentage of your shipments go overseas?

SH: I'd say a good 50, 50%.

WJ: Maybe 50%.

SH: 50%. Yes, I'd say so.

WJ: Well, I'm was thinking of titling this "Turning Trash into Cash."

SH: Oh that's true, that's good. No one's ever used that one before.

WJ: Well I thought that'd be a nice title for it. That's what you're doing.

SH: We are. Jorge has a song that he wrote and it's called "The Recycle Man" and he has a line that says "I'm going to give you money honey. Gonna give you cash for trash. Gonna try to solve some problems here. A revolutionary bash." So that's he has it in a song. It's called "Recycle Man."

WJ: Where would I get a copy of the song?

SH: You'd have to have him come sing it and then you could have the song. He doesn't have a copy.

WJ: He hasn't copyrighted it.

SH: No, he hasn't.

WJ: Well, now it sounds like it, is he a musician?

SH: Yes, he's a musician.

WJ: Sounds like something that might catch on.

SH: Well I think it is real catchy. He probably just needs to follow up on it. Get it written and get it out there. It's really good.

WJ: Well you are right at the edge of the Nashville market.

SH: That's true.

WJ: [Unintelligible] market.

SH: True, true.

WJ: At least I could get the words.

SH: Yes, you could. [unintelligible] Let me see it starts . . . I can't remember the words just off the top of my head, but he will. But it would help you see kind of our vision.

That Recycle Revolution is a concept where we think that recycling's really good, but when people melt down, we reuse. Which we don't melt things down. We reuse it in the form that it is. We're not melting things which causes more pollution, which uses more water, which uses more electricity. And by doing so we're higher on the line of recycling. If you've looked at reuse, reduce, recycle. These are the things we suggest everyone do. Well we reuse all of our materials. We're not melting or changing the form. And that makes them so unique because they are so recognizable in a product. Where you know, you could paint a bottle cap gold and put it on a piece of leather and somebody probably wouldn't even know it was a bottle cap. But we use an inner tube that's got the writing if it's on there on our inner tube. And then the bottle caps all have their own, you know they're not changed in any way except they're put on the belts so everyone knows that is a bottle cap. And we felt that we could take this in so many areas too, not just making bags. We're making bags for now and we'd like to in the future go into other fields.

Tape 1 1 00:11:37

An unidentified employee joins in.

SH: Yes, that looks cool. I like it.

?: We're going to have to start doing [unintelligible].

Media ID	Side	Start time	Subject
			<p>SH: [Unintelligible].</p> <p>?: Holes [?]</p> <p>SH: Holes. I like it. It looks very cool.</p> <p>WJ: Well you could make a fairly good airline carry-on bag.</p> <p>SH: They do a bag, I don't know if you saw it. It has a hub cap here and a hub cap here. It's got a zipper in the middle and a shoulder strap and it is very good for that. You could either cram it really full and check it or you can carry it on with you.</p> <p>WJ: Well, but it's going to turn the sensor on.</p> <p>SH: Well not the hub cap. All the belts turn the sensor on. So everybody's got a belt, they go through the airport they know better just have the belt here because it's gonna turn them on. Always.</p> <p>WJ: Always.</p> <p>SH: Always!</p>
Tape 1	1	00:12:31	<p>WJ: You say you're thinking of the future [unintelligible]. What are you thinking you might use?</p> <p>SH: We're looking at using, maybe taking old furniture and reupholstering old furniture. That's been the one thing . . .</p> <p>WJ: Now that's sharp. It can be done too.</p> <p>SH: Yes and you find furniture all over the place. And half the time the city has to go around and pick it up and then it goes to the dump. So furniture is more unique one of a kind stuff although you could do certain types. But furniture would be something we've always kind of wanted to go into. When we get a really good production level up on this.</p> <p>WJ: Well you know the springs are easy to replace. You could go the form that Flex-Steel uses. Straight flexible steel bands.</p> <p>SH: Right.</p> <p>WJ: And not have to reuse coil.</p> <p>SH: Right. I see what you're saying.</p> <p>WJ: That wouldn't be that expensive.</p> <p>SH: No it wouldn't. It would just only thing it's a harder item to market because it's bigger.</p> <p>WJ: And it becomes a fashion item of a different sort.</p> <p>SH: Definitely. Definitely. A couch in a living room with you know maybe put a little ashtray from an old junk car in it with you know do very unique things to it. Upholstery it maybe with old clothes, very specially done. It does, it becomes an interior type fashion.</p> <p>WJ: Well, denim is not a bad material to use either.</p> <p>SH: No, denim is very durable.</p> <p>WJ: It's so durable.</p> <p>SH: It could be washed</p> <p>WJ: So maybe for vacation homes denim might be a good idea.</p> <p>SH: Yes.</p> <p>WJ: Not for your formal living room.</p> <p>SH: Right, well no, but for a den or for maybe very artistic type people who, where you would find them more say in New York or L.A. You would have to market it towards that.</p> <p>WJ: Then you run into transportation.</p> <p>SH: Then you run into transportation and that sort of thing.</p> <p>WJ: Transportation isn't bad for what you have.</p> <p>SH: No, it isn't.</p> <p>WJ: Well you've got an interesting concept.</p>

Media ID	Side	Start time	Subject
			<p>SH: Thank you. We think it's interesting. We have stuck by it for quite some time. Trying to, you know to keep it, keep it on its feet and grow and get out in the market. And we always try to make a really good product. If we ever find a product flaw we try to correct it right off. We like our bags to hold up and be strong and to be durable so that they don't get recycled any time in the near future. So that they hold up and people can be use them for years and years.</p> <p>WJ: And become heirlooms.</p> <p>SH: Yes. Exactly.</p> <p>WJ: Trash into heirlooms.</p> <p>SH: True. Well every piece is one of a kind. They're all little pieces of art. It's a very artistic concept when we are putting them together no two license plates are the same, no two inner tubes are the same. Bottle caps are all different and always laid out, you know, so basically you have one of a kind production going on here. Nothing is exactly the same on every product. Seat belt straps are different colors. It's all different although we have certain styles. We have like make a label belt and it's got things like munchy cookies and candies in it. And that's always going to be laid out differently on a different colored seat belt strap that's laminated piece of plastic and that's sandwiched on a piece of seat belt strap. Then your seat belt buckle is different. So when for instance if you ever see this at a shop hanging you won't have all one kind of belt. There will always be some differences, something special about them which for the license plates its really funny because a lot of people relate to them. Maybe they're from Iowa or maybe they used to live in Texas or so there's some type of special attraction to each product and they are very good gifts also. At Christmas we do a nice business in the gift market because they're so unique. They're very special and they're great items to give as presents.</p>

Tape 1	1	00:17:36	<p>WJ: Now you've produced a catalog.</p> <p>SH: Yes, we did.</p> <p>WJ: And how do you circulate that?</p> <p>SH: Well that catalog [unintelligible] for instance right now Jorge is at a show in New York and he will be, he was there, the show was Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday called the Fashion Boutique Show and it's where all the buyers from all the women's stores come and they look at what's out there. They look at the new lines, the new clothing and those will be distributed to the buyers because we don't sell direct to the public.</p> <p>WJ: You don't issue a direct sales catalog then.</p> <p>SH: No, we don't. We don't sell direct to the market. We don't have a set up as of now to deal direct with the public and the phones would be ringing off the wall.</p> <p>WJ: I don't really think you could.</p> <p>SH: It would be difficult. They would want a different license plate. Which would be great in the future once we got larger, but right now it's easier just to sell volume to the different [stores] and let them sell it one by one to their end consumer instead of having us do it.</p> <p>WJ: Well you're not really a direct consumer producer.</p> <p>SH: Well, what do you mean?</p> <p>WJ: You might possibly be in the future, but you're not now.</p> <p>SH: No, we do not, no we do not sell direct to the public. It would just be very tedious doing it.</p> <p>WJ: And probably not cost effective.</p> <p>SH: I don't think so. I'm not sure but at this point I don't think it's cost effective. Because I know for the one bag we ship here and the one bag we ship there and the one bag that we ship here instead we ship twenty bags all at once. Although you do get the mark up if you sell direct to the public.</p> <p>WJ: Well I know that you've got prices in your catalog. They are your prices and the vendor puts his markup on.</p> <p>SH: You usually double or 2.2.</p> <p>WJ: That's what you have to do.</p> <p>SH: Yes.</p>
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