

StoryCorps Interview at Garfield Park Conservatory

Thomas Costanza and Matthew Barrett

TC: So it's mid-February and the spring show is going on and just coming up to the building was kind of awe-inspiring. It was gigantic; it was huge from the outside. Much more so than Lincoln Park's Conservatory, which I have been to before. So we came inside and just walked through the space and you enter the Palm House and it's just incredible. It's winter time, you're walking into a tropical landscape, it's just awesome. So we walked around and walked into the show house which was displaying the spring show at the time, so it was just wall-to-wall blooming azaleas and tulips and daffodils, it was just incredible. My daughter Uma's two years old so she's enamored by all these flowers as well. Uma and I went into the Sweet House and we had lunch. Even in that space and at the time it's changed so much since, but at the time there was cocoa trees and banana trees and mango. And there were squirrels running around all over us or around the space and Uma was really enamored by them. I remember telling her clearly dad's gonna work here some day. And she's not having the conversation back with me, she's two years old, but I'm gonna work here some day. And the year after that an opportunity opened up here at the conservatory and I jumped after it, got it, and the rest is history.

MB: I started working here in 2000 and when I started I was a weekend employee, so I worked, my work schedule was Wednesday through Sunday. I totally remember the moments of being in the space totally alone and having it to yourself. Have a moment to kinda clear my head, get ready for the day, get my thoughts in order.

TC: You know, you get here an hour before everyone else. That opportunity to walk the space, to walk the gardens out back really it's a great opportunity to be alone and take it in. To walk out there in mornings, particularly in the fall, where there's that fog over the great lawn, I think that's the best. That's the best. It's just hovering over the lawn.

MB: It's like pulled cotton.

TC: Yeah and it's just there because the nature of that lawn space it's like a bowl. That's the best. Man, it's been such a blast. Great experience. Many years to come.

MB: Absolutely.