A TEI Project

Interview of Joe Linton

Contents

1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (May 30, 2007)

COLLINGS

OK, good morning, Joe. This is Jane Collings interviewing Joe Linton at his home on May 30th, 2007. And why don't we just plunge right in and talk about when and where you were born?

LINTON

OK. Well, I was born in Portland, Oregon and that was on August 28th, 1963, which is actually the day of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and the March on Washington and all that stuff. Not that -- whatever, not that I had anything to do with that, but I've been happy when I hear, oh, it's the 40th anniversary of the "I Have a Dream" speech. That's my 40th birthday, but my parents actually grew up and met in Montebello and only briefly moved to Oregon and then moved back by the time I was four, so I feel like almost a California native, but happen to have been born in Portland.

COLLINGS

And what kinds of things do your parents do, or did your parents do for a living and for hobbies?

LINTON

Well, my father was a mechanical engineer who designed air conditioning systems for large buildings, and my mother was at the time a homemaker and I had an older brother and subsequently two -- a younger brother and then a younger sister. My father was an alcoholic and was mentally ill and would periodically be hospitalized for paranoid schizophrenia. He's passed away now, but largely he was absent and my parents were separated when I was four or five and then divorced when I was nine or ten, so I didn't spend that much time

with my father. I spent a lot of time with my mother and I think my mother was always very hard-working, very patient, very giving, read a lot -- like influenced me to have a lot of knowledge and culture, used to drag all of us kids to the art museums and see, like, Ingram Bergman's Magic Flute and stuff like that. We all complained, but I think it's made me comfortable around the arts and around the city, having had my mom expose me to those things.

COLLINGS

Well, she sounds like a bundle of energy, if she was working and had four kids and driving them to Ingmar Bergman movies.

LINTON

Yeah, well, it's interesting. I had said to her, well, after college -- I'm really grateful that you exposed us to all these things and that it's really made me comfortable in those circles, and she said, oh, I didn't really -- I mean, I did it for you, but I did it for me, for her, because she needed those things and we were with her and so that's where we went together.

COLLINGS

Well, what kind of background did she have, that she had this interest in the arts?

LINTON

Well, she went to Occidental College and studied history there, and I subsequently went to Occidental College and she -- that's a good question. I mean, her mom was a nurse and her father, my grandfather was a paint chemist. Her mom died before I was born so I never knew her, and I don't think that they were especially cultivated folks but I think she -- she took -- when she was in college she took a year abroad in Europe and then when my parents got married they went to Europe for like a year and a half for their honeymoon and so I think she, through college and -- I'll have to ask her how she got all that stuff that she definitely -- I mean, she still -- she goes and sees a lot of plays and she's coming up on Friday and we're going to go to the County Art Museum, so I mean, she's still -- sort of a lifelong thing that she has. I'm not exactly where she gets it.

COLLINGS

OK, did she meet your father at college?

LINTON

She actually grew up across the street from my father and they didn't -- he was like seven or eight years older, whatever. He was the son of her high school principal and she knew him some, like as a neighbor more, and then didn't really date him until she got to college.

COLLINGS

All right. So what kinds of things do your other -- your brother and your -- did you say you had two sisters?

LINTON

Two brothers and a sister. So my older brother Matt -- it's funny, because I think two of us sort of got this "get out of the suburbs" bug and two of us sort of settled into the suburbs. We grew up in Orange County, largely in Tustin, so Matt, my older brother, is an electrical technician who fixes traffic signals and owns a home in Buena Park and is very active in his church and is married and has a little daughter born this year, or late last year. I forget. Recently. Within the last year. (laughter) So, and I'm second and then my younger brother -- I always feel like I sort of got out of the suburbs into the city and my younger brother sort of got out of the suburbs into the wild, and so my younger brother studied soils and got his Ph.D. and works for the National Forest Service in Sequoia National Forest and before that worked at Zion -- er, worked at Bryce Canyon in Utah, and he's also married with kids. And then my sister married a pastor and is still in Orange County and is relatively conservative and suburban and she's a homemaker. She also teaches part-time at her kid's school, at a Christian school in Orange County.

COLLINGS

So was the church an important aspect of your family life, growing up?

LINTON

Somewhat. Early on, we didn't really attend a church and then around fourth or fifth grade I think my mother took us -- shopped around a little bit for churches and we settled at Tustin Presbyterian Church, which was definitely a big influence on me and I think on all of us. I got very involved in youth group activities there and it became pretty much social outlet growing up. I was both the athletic kid and a brainy kid, and kind of bit neither of those, so church is where I ended up fitting in a lot, and I think it's also sort of where I picked up a sense that I wanted to do something that was to give back to society, to save the world, whatever in some ways, so my younger brother describes Tustin Presbyterian Church as "high on fellowship and low on dogma," and it was a good social setting and there were work camps and stuff where we would go to -- we went to an Indian Reservation in Arizona and an orphanage in Mexico and other places and actually did work for a week, whatever, building things and stuff like that, so it was sort of a good sense of you could have a good time and enjoy yourself giving in the situation, and actually, I just got back from a week away from a wedding last week of the son of my high school pastor. Rex McDaniel was the pastor at Tustin Presbyterian Church from when I entered high school through my college years and was a big influence on me and sort of a father figure growing up. My parents were divorced. My dad wasn't -- I mean, I would see my dad, sometimes once a month but then he would go into the hospital and we wouldn't see him for a while. (laughter) I definitely saw him some, but not all that regularly, and Rex sort of -- Rex and I would have

breakfast once a week and talk about our dreams and what's going on and like actually interpret our dreams and I was involved in -- I was actually the junior custodian at the church and I would clean up after events and whatnot and I got a job as one of the leaders of the summer youth program, what's called Junior Fun Club.

COLLINGS

All right!

LINTON

Yeah, it was the fifth and sixth graders, and so I was a counselor and I was -- I ended up being the director of all the counselors, like of a squad of volunteers, and I think we had sixty or seventy kids and eight or nine or ten high school volunteer leaders and I worked that job through I think after my freshman year in college, even, was the director there, was initially the assistant director and then the director, but I think Rex was always very -- Rex and I would read books and discuss To Kill a Mockingbird. I'm trying to think of what other -- and sort of, who was somebody who, like my mother, read a lot, wanted to discuss and kick around ideas. It's funny, because he's become a little more conservative and we hang out. He's actually moved away to Washington D.C. either just after I got out of college or around that time, and then both his kids came back to California, and then so he and his wife are now in South Pasadena, but it was actually (inaudible), so his son got married the last week and so I was hanging out with Rex and his son Brian and their family.

COLLINGS

So do you remain connected to that church?

LINTON

I don't. I think, like I was saying, I had a hard time fitting in in high school and so church became a place where I was affirmed as a leader and did well and was successful and filled that niche and I got to college and I felt successful and confident and the church people in college seemed more singularly focused, whatever, and less social and less interactive and all kinds of folks were successful and smart and so I had a more -- I was more popular and fit in well in college, and didn't -- early on, freshman, maybe sophomore year, I would go to Christian group meetings and stuff, decreasingly frequently, and not -- I mean, I consider myself agnostic now and not -- I mean, I kind of -- I mean, I always had doubts and I wasn't sure, and yet church was a good place to fit in and then as it became whatever, as I needed that social space less, the religion kind of fell away and stuff like that, but as I said, I think I got values and, you know, like humanitarian which is interesting it's not really -- it should be like spiritual, but it's humanitarian values from Tustin Presbyterian Church and from Rex and from activities that we did there.

COLLINGS

So were those humanitarian and social values something that comes from that particular church? I'm sorry, I'm not familiar with Presbyterianism per se. Or was it really coming from that pastor?

LINTON

Well, I think -- I suspect some of both, definitely. I mean, I think more that pastor, and I think that, like, my sister's husband now is a Presbyterian minister and is very conservative and less about service and about -- I don't know, a little more judgemental and stuff than what I remembered growing up at Tustin Presbyterian Church, so I'm not sure. I think that while I was in college, I also became more -- I mean, I grew up this kind of sheltered suburban kid, and I got to college and kind of saw the city and saw human rights and all kinds of history and stuff that I hadn't really been aware of, politics, just generally that I hadn't been aware of, and I think -- had a hard time and I became more aware of the small-mindedness of the church in some ways. I don't know if small-minded is -- conservatism probably is a better way to say it, of the roles of women, attitudes towards gay and lesbians, just limits to kind of intellectual questioning, kind of like this -- I don't know, I got to a point where, and I still feel this, that nothing should be ultra-absolutely. Even environmentalist dogma shouldn't be -- whatever. We should always be listening and adjusting and figuring out a fit and a mix more than laying down a law, kind of.

COLLINGS

And how did your mother choose this church? Did she choose it for the social values?

LINTON

It's a good question. I'm not sure how she chose it and what's interesting is, so she taught Sunday school. I'm not sure how she chose it, but I'd like to talk about what her experiences were there. All the kids kind of jumped in. Actually, my older brother a little less than myself, my younger brother Mark and my sister Liz. But the kids became pretty attached pretty quickly to the activities. My mother taught Sunday school and as a single parent felt very ostracized in some ways. She was told -- she was a great Sunday school teacher and we would assist her different weeks. Each one of us would go into her class and stuff and the kids loved her and she did a great job and yet she was told that the best Sunday school teacher would be a husband and wife team and stuff like that, and so she felt like as a single woman she wasn't affirmed and so she graducally -- I think she was active for maybe four years or something and then kind of I think as we got into high school -- as I got into high school and my other brothers were younger and older in their places, whatever, she sort of dropped out of church but we remained active and she was supportive of that but not -- but withdrew herself, whatever. So still told us there and got whatever, supported us in being active there and encouraged that, but she felt

that discrimination and I think that was some of my -- she talked about that to us, and that was some of my -- and I had kind of feminist awakening in college and I think seeing how difficult it was for my mom, that she would be working two jobs and going back to school and having to borrow money from her father and not -- whatever, just that she -- whatever, she worked really hard and got very little and she was on Social Security for a little while at that point and people -- I forget who she was saying. Somebody was critical of that, and you know, we needed that I think, so it's not -- it's sort of...

COLLINGS

That was from your father. Was it (inaudible) his disability?

LINTON

I think so, too. He had -- actually we ended up getting money from -- he first -- and it's a genetic disease that he had that made him crazy, but his first manifestation of that was in the war in Korea, and so he had veteran's benefits but I think it was just -- I think the money my mom got was that she was -- I think she was in school full-time and she was working as, like, an emergency room clerk in the hospital, you know, and raising four kids and teaching Sunday school all in the middle of that or whatever. And she -- I think it was just like AFDC or something. I'm not sure exactly what it was, but just poverty money more than -- I'm not sure, though.

COLLINGS

So that was her job, she was working in an emergency room?

LINTON

Yeah, she ultimately -- she went back to school and she had studied history at Occidental College and then had dropped out her senior year to get married to my father and they took off for a year in Europe and so she was kind of all but degree at Oxy and then she went back to Cal State Fullerton and she got a degree in library science and started working -- she actually was driving a bookmobile for a little while, and then worked at that public library in Tustin and then at the school district, central library for Tustin Unified School District and worked at the medical center library at UC Irvine for maybe almost twenty years, I think, at the -- a long stint there, so...

COLLINGS

And you also suggested that she was involved in the oral history program at Cal State Fullerton?

LINTON

Yeah, the way I remember this is that in fifth grade we were in this -- what's it called? They changed names while I was there. Anyways, like, gifted and talented program. I can't -- oh, well. There was an acronym for that and I don't remember what it was now.

COLLINGS

GATE?

LINTON

Yeah, but I think it was ALP. Advanced Learning Program, and then I think it changed to GATE or something like that, anyways, but -- so we were bussed to a school not too far from -- just across town, across Tustin, which was small and the teacher, Mrs. Kinch, I had for fifth grade, had these mini-courses where parents and friends of parents who specialized in their field would teach a class to groups of students and we would have these big sheets on he wall that said, you know, "Marge Linton is teaching oral history," you know, "sign up," and so we -- what I remember, we interviewed -- we actually interviewed a friend of mine's mom who had been in the Japanese internment camps in World War II, and then we went to like a retirement home and interviewed some other elderly Japanese Americans, too, so it was neat because it was very, whatever. My mom kind of taught us and we had to actually come up with questions that we were going to ask the person and then ask them, and it was very -- not sure if that was Miss Kinch's doing or my mom's doing, whatever, but it was definitely like the kids were in charge but there was a sense that we couldn't just go in there and wing it, that we had to actually think about what we were going to do, but it wasn't just watching my mom interview somebody. It was us interviewing somebody.

COLLINGS

So when you were in high school, were you starting to think about what you might want to do with your life?

LINTON

Yeah, I mean, in high school I thought -- I mean, I was always good at science and I thought I wanted to be a physician because I thought that would be a good way to help people and potentially I could go to the Third World somewhere and help poor people and sort of -- I think it's a very -- you know, had been doing these work camps for with the church and stuff, so I think I had this sense of doing good is, like, going somewhere else and charity, you know, helping them, stuff like that. So that's what I -- I'm not sure how early on that was, maybe junior year in high school or something.

COLLINGS

(Your mother) is working in a hospital.

LINTON

Yeah, I think though she was -- well, she was working in the emergency room. That was a very -- it was kind of a clerk job and not -- I don't think it's something she identified with too much, but -- gosh, I'm not sure when she -- I'm trying to think of when she started working for the medical center, because I worked there briefly after college and she was definitely established by that time, but I don't think that she was -- I think she was working for maybe for

like the school district library, the central library, a thing called the Instructional Resource Center, the IRC, for my later high school years. But I'm not totally sure whether these things match up. But I'm not sure that -- even though she worked in a -- she worked in a little community hospital that was sort sleepy and -- I don't remember being inspired by that. It seemed more like a church thing, that I was -- that's how I thought I could help people, and I think the other thing I was thinking of was being a teacher at the time, like a high school teacher, because that was another thing where I saw people helping people, so I think it was more -- I mean, I think I still had a pretty narrow orbit. My range of vision of what one could do to help people was -- hadn't seen what a city looked like, or what politics was yet.

COLLINGS

What were your friends thinking of doing when they were in high school? Did they ever talk about what they were going to do?

LINTON

I'm trying to think of who I -- I mean, I think the sense was that we needed to, like, I had a friend who played a trumpet, whose dad was a lawyer, who planned to be a lawyer. Kyle Tonokawa, he was always going to be like an engineer or something, like scientific, but I think that's similar to his dad too. I mean, I think we kind of saw in our families maybe what we could do, but I don't remember a lot of really strong -- I think the sense was that we needed to do well enough to get into a decent college, to do something good.

COLLINGS

So, I mean, Oxy is really expensive now. I don't know how it was at that time. Was that a problem?

LINTON

Well, not too bad, although I mean, I ended up with a bunch of student loans and stuff, but the -- I mean, a couple things helped it. One is that there were some veteran, disabled veterans benefits that I got financial aid from Oxy. Got a tiny bit, actually got a Presbyterian church scholarship the first year, but I had kind of -- like I said, my horizon was pretty narrow and my mom had gone to Oxy and she would take us to, like, theater during the summer there and there's a big outdoor Greek bowl theater and so her brother had gone there. Rex, my minister, had gone there, and it was sort of like, oh, you should consider Oxy. I also remember thinking, I was playing water polo and swimming at the time, and I was good enough to be a good whatever, a good high school player, but not good enough to go to -- like, if I had gone to a big university like UCLA or something I might have been able to like pick one of those, swimming probably and really work at it and barely make the team or something like that. Like I could've been a really small fish in a big pool, as they say, or going to Oxy I would be able to swim and play water polo, and so I -- I think we took some -- I

think I looked at like Berkeley and stuff. I mean, I went -- I took a couple trips and explored -- I think UCLA and Berkeley, but I applied early decision at Oxy and went over the financial aid stuff and it looked like it could work OK, and I was accepted early decision and so I went there without even applying anywhere else, it turned out, so -- and it was -- the other thing, too, I mean, it was close enough to -- it's like 50 miles from home, so it's like it's not -- whatever. I was far enough to be on my own, but I was close enough that I could get home when I really wanted to and stuff like that, so it was a good distance. I don't think I was ready to go to Berkeley or go to New York or something like that, you know. I think that was a big enough leap for me to go to Los Angeles from Tustin.

COLLINGS

OK, so here you are at college and you're starting to hear all these other kinds of ideas.

LINTON

Well, I think one of the -- so there were two seniors that I had known from Tustin Presbyterian Church who were at Oxy , Leigh Evans and Carri Patterson, and there's was woman who they hung around with, so I was hanging around with them some, and there was a womean, Janette Sadik-Khan who they were hanging out with who was really sharp and attractive and was leading the campus against Apartheid in South Africa and trying to get the Occidental College to divest its investments. And gosh, I remember a conversation with her saying -- and she was very political and very sharp. She just got appointed by Bloomberg to head the Department of Transportation in New York City, like a month ago. I lost touch with her, but she has a distinctive name and I saw -- anyways, I saw that in an announcemnt from the Bike Coalition equivalent group there called Transportation Alternatives, and I remembered talking with her about politics and telling her I think people really need to get their act together before they get all political, and she was very -- she could've said, oh, you're a foolish freshman from the suburbs, but she said that part of how you get your act together is to get engaged in your community and your politics and stuff, and I still remember too, there's a big -- I think it's called "O Day", this, where a lot of alumni come back to the college and celebrate the college birthday and stuff, and there was a ceremony at lunch and the ceremony ended and she ran onto the stage and grabbed the microphone and her voice was kind of trembling and she said, like, there's a lot to celebrate about Oxy and it's great, but there's some things we need to change, and apartheid and divestment and it really took guts and poise and it wasn't -- she wasn't like screaming into the microphone or something, too. She was very measured, but still very rebellious and, like, daunting kind of in a way. So I think -- I mean, I think some of my -- as I was becoming a little, and I remember the summer after my

freshman year, just saying like, wow, you know, there's all this politics stuff that you know, and I feel like telling her, you know, I want to do good stuff and I feel like I just don't know politics, and how do I -- what should I be doing to get up to speed, and stuff like that, and so she actually gave me recommendations on subscribing to -- there was a couple things. The one I remember was ADA, like, Americans for Democratic Action, or whatever, and reading their newsletter, so it's like this one. And so I even remember, too, like I had -- the water polo team would go back to school in, like, August and school wouldn't start until September, and we would have like a month of training camps and I remember having, like, subscribed to these things and getting them out of my box with the water polo team, and people were like, hey, what's that? What are you reading? And I'm like, oh, it's Americans for Democratic Action, and so starting to feel like, oh, this is my politics and this is something I can share and influence, and I remember actually I can picture his face, but telling that to a freshman, being like probably a sophomore, maybe a junior, and them being like, "Oh, wow, that's cool that you subscribe to that," and feeling like I was starting to know something and was starting to pass that on. I think, too, that Oxy didn't have -- so I got involved in student government my junior year, and...

COLLINGS

Had you done that in high school?

LINTON

No, I hadn't. You know, I ran for -- I ran for I think, like, vice president in junior high and in, like, eighth grade and lost in a two-person race, and...

COLLINGS

Why did you run?

LINTON

Became discouraged... You know, it's a good question, because I think I was still pretty socially backward. I was a geek, kind of. I mean, I was athletic, but I was still -- I would sit around and draw and stuff in junior high. That's what people knew me for. I'm not sure what inspired me to run. I think it was a sense of -- I think it's more like a popularity thing than anything. I think I thought that, oh, maybe I could be a little popular and this is something that I could do, and I think it was another thing too, where I think there weren't a lot of people running and stuff like that, and I thought, well, I could do that, but I lost and didn't. So in high school, I didn't do it at all.

COLLINGS

So when you were at Oxy and you said to -- Janette, was it?

LINTON

Janette Sadik-khan, yeah.

COLLINGS

That you have to get yourself together -- one has to get oneself together before you can think about helping others? Is that what you said? What did you mean by getting yourself together, and then also, you were already planning that you were going to help others, like possibly by being a doctor or something.

LINTON

Yeah. Well, I think it had to do with -- I mean, Rex and I did a lot of kind of growth stuff around, like, interpreting dreams but also like Jungian psychology and kind of -- gosh, there was a lot of stuff that I don't remember that well, but I remember talking about, like, I statements, like somehow -- that as you're talking with someone, instead of accusing, to found stuff in "I" and like that.

COLLINGS

I feel that that is (inaudible), yeah.

LINTON

Exactly, and now it's like non-violent communication, there's a bunch of things I've studied, that say that too. But it's like -- so that was some of the work that Rex and I would read about and discuss and think about, like, interpersonal communication and journaling, trying to understand what am I thinking, what am I going through in this situation, so that was more -- that was the work I'd been doing more, wasn't political. It was more getting in touch with one's self, you know.

COLLINGS

And you felt that this work needed to be complete before moving to another stage?

LINTON

I guess. Looking back at myself, I think I just didn't know anything about politics, whatever, and had to -- and here was this woman who was -- definitely had her stuff together, who I was trying to have something to say to, so I don't know that I was thinking. I mean, I think it was just -- I don't know. You're right, I did in the long run want to be a doctor and want to help people, so I mean, I wasn't -- but it wasn't a political things so much.

COLLINGS

So then here you are and you become attracted to politics and then you decided to get involved in student government, so this is a new direction it sounds like.

LINTON

Yeah, and I think too, what -- something that helped a lot, too, so I ran for -- there was, like, we call it the "seven-person junta." I ran for what was called publications director, which was responsible for the college newspaper and was part of like a seven-member board that was responsible for all the student government, and I ran against one person and I won that time. (laughter) And I think that summer they needed somebody -- the summer before my junior year, they needed somebody to represent Oxy on what what was called the Los

Angeles Collegiate Council, which is theoretically all the student body presidents would get together and meet, but there was no -- whatever. In theory all seven were equal, although there was a guy, Breck Tostevin who was really sharp and really political who was kind of the head of the seven-member junta more or less, whatever. I was definitely in there but I wasn't leading the show. But I think other people were away for the summer and there was a couple meetings to go during the summer and I could make them from -- I was down in Orange County, and I actually met a lifelong friend through this, a guy named Joe Krovoza who was at Pasadena City College at the time and was planning to transfer to Oxy and did, and we were college roommates senior year, my senior year at Oxy, both of our senior years at Oxy. And these were all much bigger colleges than Oxy, whatever. Maybe not all, but almost all, and folks like weighing in on MTA, transportation issues and how that affects students. On statewide, there was a big -- there was a big push to begin charging at community colleges and to raise tuition rates at Cal States and UCs, and private colleges were affected to in some reduction of scholarship moneys (inaudible). And so there was a very -- there was like a state-wide campaign and politics and it was -- I think it was more role models, too. It was like Jeanette Sadikan(?), who has seen these folks who were no smarter than I was. (laughter) (inaudible) But who knew the politics, and who were keeping up with these things and making a difference and organizing students on their campuses around issues that were occurring. I mean some of the things were really small, like parking and stuff like that, whatever, like we had a huge thing about -- I think the UCLA people let it on like that, whatever, the city couldn't ticket without cleaning the street, whatever. Anyway, stuff like that, so I mean, some of them were small issues, but even like Olympics, we wanted student involvement and discount things when the Olympics were kind of in '84 and stuff like that, but it was a good -- it showed me, whatever, that there were active engaged political people out there and. again, people like Joe Krovoza who I became friends with who -- who were engaged and sharp and showed me ways to do things, and counted on me for things and that I could deliver, and stuff like that.

COLLINGS

And what did you call it? The seven-person -- seven-member junta?

LINTON

Yeah, that was called the SCC. That was at Oxy. That's the Student Coordinating Committee of the Associated Students of Occidental College. I think there were like two policy, a secretary. I was publications. I don't remember what the other three positions were, but we had a budget that we controlled. We appointed a lot of people to run film series and speaker series, stuff that we funded. We hired the editor of the newspaper and made decisions

on (laughter) I made a bad decision on -- like, the typesetting machine was wearing out, and becoming unreliable, and we had to decide to make a big expenditure on a new typesetting machine, like in '84, just like three years later, computers would be (inaudible) we invested in a big new typesetting machine, because we didn't see that coming. But it wasn't -- I mean, I think that -- it actually got disbanded at Oxy recently, I read, because they challenged the administration on things. We weren't pushy. I mean, we could've been pushier, probably, but I think that -- I think what it did -- I mean, I think it was good for -- you know, we were seven people who were deciding -- I forget what our budget was, but it was like, I want to say like thirty or fifty thousand for a year, or something. I mean, it wasn't -- it was pretty big potatoes to me at the time. (laughter) And there was -- I mean, there was a lot of interest. I think we actually started a thing that also got disbanded, like a student senate that was mostly designed to try to activate more folks into politics of the college.

COLLINGS

So with all of this activity, what were you starting to think you might do when you -- what was your major at this point? Was it still history?

LINTON

I majored in biochemistry actually, so -- and never really wavered from that. I did -- well, I was doing sports, whatever I was doing, waterpolo in the fall and swimming in the winter, and then I actually did track in the spring to lift weights, whatever, on my off-season. And so I hadn't done a lot of art, and I had focused, and early on I took a lot of science, whatever, had to get all my pre-med and stuff out of the way, sort of. And so, by junior and senior year, I still had whatever, like one track worth of science stuff that I was finishing, but I ended up with a lot more electives and stuff at that time, and I ended up taking history of human rights in Latin America, and more like contemporary novel and -- I'm trying to think -- didn't take that much real politics, but I started to -- and I started to take more art classes. I had a hard time taking art classes because a lot of them were like afternoon studios and I had sports practice at the time, but Oxy started a program with Art Center College of Design where I could take night classes there, and taking art classes at art center and taking some art history too, at Oxy. And I think I was like one class short of an art minor, anyways.

COLLINGS

Sounds like you were incredibly busy.

LINTON

Yeah, I think -- it's funny, because I think that I peaked junior year. I think I was really busy junior year, and I started to -- I started to become a lot more -- whatever, I had always sort of said, OK, I'm going to do science and I'm good at science and I think I've got -- I got straight A's in math and in physics and

mostly in chemistry. I think I was freshman chemistry of the year person. You know what, I was. I was freshman chemist of the year, and I was freshman of the year, whatever. I got good grades early on, and then I kind of -- the beginning of my senior year I took the MCAT and I started to be less sure that -- I mean, it became more -- I mean, I always had a lot of interests, but politics was definitely ascending. Art was ascending, and the sense that science was the only way I could do something good for the world was sort of crumbling, you know. And so I wasn't as sure -- like, I thought -- at the time, I decided kind of, OK, I'll take a year off and I'll work and I'll go back to med school later, and I think even during -- I actually never graduated from college. Oxy has these things called comps [comprehensive exams] that are your master's thesis, whatever, and so for chemistry I had to do a...

COLLINGS

Master's? Or is this for Bachelor's?

LINTON

For Bachelor's. I had to do a -- take this national exam, which I did fine, and I had to do a presentation on a current topic of research, and I didn't work hard enough on it and I kind of -- most of the chemistry students were not that good public speakers, and I thought, oh, I'll be able to ace this because I can actually explain things and stuff. And I didn't -- I don't think I did that badly, but I didn't have enough -- I didn't prepare well enough, and so I was then supposed to take that half-hour talk and turn that into a paper and add more detail to it, and I never finished that paper. I thought I was going to do it in the summer, and I never finished it, so I never actually graduated.

COLLINGS

Now, when you were thinking about being a doctor, were you also sort of thinking about what kind of salary a doctor would make? Was that kind of consideration an issue for you?

LINTON

I mean, insomuch as it would be good to have somewhat comfortable salary, that was fine, I don't think I was thinking of it. I mean, I think I was thinking that I would be, whatever, going to Nicaragua or something and being a doctor and so I didn't think it would be a huge salary, but I thought it would be something where -- I think part of it was, so my dad as a mechanical engineer, he would go crazy and be in the hospital for six months and walk out and be able to walk into a job and make good money, whatever, very easily, so I think I saw being a doctor as somewhat similar to that in that if I ever needed money it shouldn't be too hard to make decent money as a doctor.

COLLINGS

But as you went through college, that became less of an issue for you, it sounds like.

LINTON

Yeah, I mean, I'm not sure that I ever -- I'm not sure that it was -- I think I never -- I didn't see myself taking a vow of poverty or anything, but I didn't -- I don't think the reason I wanted to be a doctor -- or the reason I wanted to be a doctor was never to make money hand over foot. It was to be comfortable enough, but to be able to do good stuff.

COLLINGS

So what did you think, then, you were going to do?

LINTON

Well, I kind of wasn't sure. I felt like I had a lot going on and that held my attention better than science did, and I felt like to be a doctor would be very demanding and focused in a way that I felt like I didn't want to be that focused on that. So I took some time off. I got a job working at UC Irvine at the hospital in a clinical laboratory and ended up -- I actually worked Sunday through Thursday and so I would come up to L.A. on Fridays and check out art galleries and do whatever. I think I was exploring the city and stuff, so I moved back into Orange County and moved out for a little while and then moved back into my mom's for a little while, and I -- the idea of going back to school became less and less of a -- I was doing my art, I was volunteering. Trying to think. I got involved in Green Party stuff, although that was more -- yeah, that was when I was in Santa Ana. I mean, I moved out from my mom's to this old neighborhood in Santa Ana, near downtown Santa Ana. Gosh, like the late Eighties are all a blur now. I mean, I left college in '85 and I moved to Long Beach in 1990, and yeah, I mean, I was taking -- I was taking some night classes at Art Center still, and I was -- I think I was kind of groping for where I was interested in the environment, but not finding things really where I was. And I think the reason -- I mean, ultimately, I moved to Long Beach, I got involved in L.A. River issues, which felt very -- like, the environment, but right here, in the city, and not the rainforest or global warming or something far away.

COLLINGS

Yeah, something gigantic and far away, yeah.

LINTON

Yeah, so -- but I was doing -- I was, like, walking, volunteering walking precincts for Democratic candidates in Orange County and these neighbors of mine were a gay couple that were very involved in Democratic Party stuff and would talk with them about politics stuff. One of them was a civil rights lawyer. Actually, he got elected to office in West Hollywood later, but they were these good radical gay -- well, they weren't like ACT-UP or anything, but they were politically engaged, smart, gay, open. I forget all that. So I worked in a laboratory. There was a job that opened up in the computer department

supporting the laboratory and even though I wasn't qualified for that I ended up getting that job and making more money and learning a skill that was more portable, too, so then I -- ultimately I worked on computer systems for hospitals, starting at UC Irvine and then I was recruited by a hospital in Long Beach and then by Children's Hospital in Los Angeles, so -- and I was always -- I mean, I did well and I worked hard and people -- whatever, I was smart and creative and in some ways I was like the -- there were, like, programming people who really couldn't talk to people in the computer department, and then I was sort of the interface person who would be out talking to the lab and talking to the nurses and talking to the physicians and understanding what they're asking for and what the systems were capable of.

COLLINGS

Wow, that's so valuable.

LINTON

Yeah, kind of interfacing people-wise and stuff, so I think I was good at that stuff, but I remember thinking -- we would have these big system implementations that we would work for a year on, and then put in an all night for weeks. We were like debugging and stuff, and I remember thinking after a couple of those, if I were to put this sort of effort into my art or into my politics, that I'd really have more to show for it than into implementing a new computer system for a hospital. Which wasn't bad, or whatever. I mean, I was glad to be doing something that was about helping people, about health ultimately, but it was definitely just a job, although I think I worked hard and did well. How are we doing?

1.2. Session 2 (June 12, 2007)

COLLINGS

OK, good morning, Joe. It's June 12th, 2007, Jane Collings interviewing Joe Linton at his home. And we left off last time with -- we had talked about your early life and education and your post-college computer analyst work, and this time we were going to start talking about your -- the beginnings of your real work as an activist.

LINTON

Yeah, well, I think that -- actually, it's funny, because I think it actually worked well as a model for me to have -- to be working a job for 40 hours a week and then doing lots of art and activism on the side. And I mean -- well, I got involved in Friends of the L.A. River in 1993, when Lewis MacAdams, the founder of Friends of the L.A. River, came and spoke in Long Beach before I'd even moved here to Eco-Village. And it sounded -- well, it appealed to me because I had biked. I was bicycling -- at that point, too, OK, so even before

that I'm thinking -- I mean, I started to have some environmental consciousness and interest, but I wasn't -- I hadn't really -- I think I was kind of looking around for something, for a cause to make mine, and so -- but I had begun to -- when I moved to Long Beach, so I was living in Santa Ana, working at UC Irvine Medical Center. Then I moved to Long Beach, was working at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center. So I had had a car, actually, when I was living in Santa Ana, although I did bike a lot, and I did even walk to work some days, which would take me, like, 45 minutes and it would take me ten minutes to drive. Anyway, so I was sort of experimenting with not driving, and I guess in 1991 was the Gulf War, so I was working at the hospital in Long Beach and I was -- when I moved to Long Beach, I deliberately moved somewhere where I could get to work without using my car, just because I was thinking it would be good to take the bus. I was actually in a good -- I could take the bus or the train really easily and I could even bike along the L.A. River to work, although most days I took the bus or the train. But I would go to the corner and take whichever bus or train came first, so...

COLLINGS

That's a great situation.

LINTON

Yeah, so I figure -- I was sort of -- you know, I was considering giving up my car for -- mostly for environmental reasons, and the first Gulf War, I believe that was '91, like February '91.

COLLINGS

January 15th.

LINTON

That's right, that's right. And I had actually -- so I was actually really busy at the hospital, implementing a new computer system or something right at the beginning of '91 and I wanted to be more involved in the kind of anti-war stuff but I was too busy at work and I had -- by that time, I believe I started working at the hospital in Long Beach in, like, Fall of '89 or so. Actually, what does it say on my resume? (laughter) What do I claim? 1990. Yeah, it was either the end of '89 or beginning of '90 that I moved to Long Beach. And so by early '91 I had basically -- gosh, I think I put 1,200 miles on my car in the course of a year, and that included like a 300 mile road trip, whatever, so I had -- I had gotten into the habit of just not using a car, and so I decided that for the first Gulf War that I would -- that I couldn't get to the protests but I could unload my car, and not -- whatever, I felt that we're, today, as we were then, fighting foreign wars for oil and that part of my contribution to not supporting that way, maybe actively opposing that war, would be to get rid of my car. So I got rid of my car. I believe it was March 14th, because I remember it was a month after Valentine's Day. Somehow I remember that. Anyways, but by that time, I had -

- I mean, once I had my commute down without a car, it's pretty easy to do the rest of my trips, to the store or to entertainment or whatever, and I was living in the west side of downtown Long Beach, very near -- like downtown Long Beach is kind of a hub of transit, so -- and by that time, too, I was riding the bus a lot and I was drawing a lot on the bus. I would draw pictures of people, draw bus interiors and stuff, so I've got lots of those. So -- and I would read, whatever. I think time spend on the bus is not a burden, whatever. It's time that you get to, whatever, that you get to relax, you're not stressed. It's time that you can...

COLLINGS

Depends on how crowded it is.

LINTON

Yeah, exactly. (laughter) If you can't find a seat, it's less of that, but it's generally -- it's a time when you can -- when I spend either reading or sketching and sometimes meeting people and talking with people and observing the city around me and stuff like that. But yeah, it's funny because when I did -- when I moved to L.A. and was riding the bus from here to Children's Hospital, a lot of times it was much too crowded to sit down and I noticed I drew less.

COLLINGS

I would think so! (laughter)

LINTON

Yeah, but so, I think that that was -- and what's interesting about that, too, is that I knew -- I mean, I (inaudible). Actually, there's a Greenpeace book on the environmental impacts of the car. I'm trying to think of other early literature that informed me of that. I mean, I kind of knew that cars were a big problem and I was -- I thought of it mostly in terms of oil and in terms of pollution and I think now I've come to embrace -- well, water quality is a huge one that I wasn't aware of at the time, and permeability and stuff like that. I mean, if we're really looking at a healthy Los Angeles River, we're going to need to have a whole lot less cars in the Basin, and a lot more permeable surfaces and whatever. There's actually a lot of connections between cars and rivers in a way, cars and problems in rivers. But I think what I was -- what I hadn't realized too, at the time, was sort of cars' impact on cities. I mean, I grew up in a suburb and kind of just assumed that, you know, everyone would have a car and that cars were an integral part of human civilization or something, and I think as I read different things, and there a -- I think it's a Berkeley or San Francisco study about people not knowing their neighbors on streets with heavy traffic versus knowing their neighbors on streets with lighter traffic and things like that, I think I've become a lot more aware of how our urban quality of life is impoverished and public health impoverished by a preponderance of cars.

COLLINGS

Did you know anybody else who was giving up their car?

LINTON

You know, I didn't. I think it was a kind of fun thing to be sort of maverick and do something that would surprise people, but I mean, I -- I mean, around, like, '95, '96, I started getting involved with the Bus Riders Union and I met a few people there that were -- that had chosen to not have a car. But I mean, I had -- I think I -- there's the statistic that in L.A. County there's like 400,000 people without a car, so people would (inaudible) have a car and say, "Oh, he's one of the only people without a car!" And I'd say, well, no, there's about 400,000 of us, so it's...

COLLINGS

How is that number -- how is that counted?

LINTON

I think that's a census number, but I think it's based on -- I actually think it's -- I think it's an undercount, I've come to think -- that it's based on people who -- it's based on, like, boardings of the bus system and not -- anyways, I think it's based on bus system, on people that are dependent on the bus system in L.A. I think it's a number from MTA. But yeah, I didn't really -- I mean, a lot of -- I think it's actually something that's sort of -- it's a frustration to me that within Los Angeles environmentalist circles, I believe they're -- and even in peace circles, whatever, I think there's a disconnect with realizing that if we are to -- like I said, if we're going to have healthy rivers, if we're going to have peace and (laughter) we're not going to be going to other countries and bombing them in oil-rich regions and Colombia and Nigeria and Iraq and you name it, we're going to need to -- I mean, we should be connecting -- I mean, I think at the time, too -- I mean, I was starting to read stuff about how -- like, how do our lifestyles impact the environment? I think I was -- some of the early environmental activists I came in touch with was, like, Green Party and started to hear about things like the rain forest and saving wilderness and stuff like that, and I wasn't -- that didn't appeal to me that much. I was much more interested in how do we and how do I live in a city and look at what my impact is.

COLLINGS

Do you remember what it was when Lewis MacAdams spoke that particularly appealed to you?

LINTON

Well, I think part of it was similar to what I just said, was I had been biking -- well, as a kid, I biked along the Santa Ana River to get to the ocean. It would take us like an hour, and we would -- my brothers and my friends, whatever, we would get on our ten-speeds and ride and ride and ride and get to the ocean and be exhausted, and that river is concrete with a bike path along it, and so -- and

when I moved to Long Beach I was maybe a quarter mile from the L.A. River, maybe less. And it had a bike path along it, and it was largely concrete but it's actually -- in Long Beach there's an estuary which is about almost three miles of unpaved bottom, so you actually get a lot of egrets and herons and stuff like that. So I'd seen these big white birds. I didn't know what they were, but I didn't even know that that was the Los Angeles River. I just knew that's where I could catch a bike path that would take me north. So Lewis MacAdams -- I think what was so -- there was Lewis MacAdams and Martin Schlagader and Jim Danza and I think there was a fourth gentleman too. And they were actually dressed up, and I remember Lewis was wearing, like, a vintage tie and kind of artsy and poetic -- he's a poet, and wasn't -- was both not talking about like a faraway environmental cause, but talking about an environmental cause that was a quarter mile from where I lived, and was creative and had an energy that wasn't -- I don't know, I think some environmentalists can be sort of -- and probably I could be this way, too. Like, oh, I'd better not pollute. Well, I can't eat beef, and I can't do this, and I can't do that, and I've got to recycle.

COLLINGS

(inaudible)

LINTON

Yeah, exactly, they're sort of -- yeah, I call it, like, the monk complex. Like, oh, I've got to give this up and give that up, whatever. And it's sort of -- I think there was more of a joy and a creativity to what -- especially what Lewis was saying, but all three of them -- gosh, I can't remember the fourth one. Anyways, all four of them, even the one I don't remember, but -- so they were having a fundraiser. There was actually -- there was a proposal that the county and the Army Corps were working on that would build parapet walls along the river ten feet high that would further -- that would prevent flooding, but that would further separate communities from the river and they were looking for support from different groups, and I was part of a group called LBACI -- it was called Long Beach Area Citizens Involved and I think we were just sort of realizing that, like, citizens has come to be sort of an exclusive word that I don't use.

COLLINGS

You mean in the context of the immigration debate?

LINTON

Yeah, exactly. So, it's something -- actually, I'm really careful to say, you know, resident activism and not citizen activism. There's a broader global citizen thing, but it tends to be -- it tends to be a word that...

COLLINGS

It's become a very charged word.

LINTON

Yeah, yeah, that excludes certain people, but the group was called Long Beach Area Citizens Involved, and it was kind of a broad-spectrum lefty group that was looking at schools, looking at gay rights, looking at environmental issues in Long Beach, looking at elections, endorsing candidates and doing phone banking and stuff like that to get progressive candidates, especially within the City of Long Beach, and so that was a good -- there was a guy, Paul -- actually, there is this guy Paul Burton -- Burden, or Burton? Burton, Paul Burton, who was a musician who played a lot of benefits and was very much like an artist in the service of the cause, who actually -- he's the one who told me that Friends of the L.A. River would be at that meeting and wanted to make -- he thought I would be interested in that and wanted to make sure I was there. Little bit older than that, maybe ten years older than I was. Maybe fifteen. Anyways, had two young kids and his wife was a teacher and they were living in an old house in -- more or less in my neighborhood in kind of southwest Long Beach. And so he was sort of a role model person who was both -- they were kind of -- LBACI had a lot of kind of straitlaced -- a lot of retired people. In fact, the group's folded since, because they didn't -- it aged. It was founded out of the McCarthy campaign in the early 70's.

COLLINGS

Oh, that's very interesting.

LINTON

And so there was sort of this upwelling of liberal fervor in Long Beach, and they actually accomplished many things. Like Alan Lowenthal, who's now a state senator, was -- LBACI helped get him elected to the city council in Long Beach and he went on to the state assembly and student senate. So the group was able to -- especially at the local level, at the -- gosh, there was a school, in the school board in Long Beach and in the city council in Long Beach, we would endorse candidates and in close races I think we helped make a difference. So -- but there were also sort of the, like, Food Not Bombs anarchist collective folks, too, who I hung out with a little but I wasn't as -- I think I was a little more established and stuff, whatever. It was funny, I remember showing up to table for LBACI and so I sort of had these three worlds in a way that I went in and out of, that I had activists, I had artists, and I work in hospitals, and I remember showing up at a tabling event for LBACI and I had come straight from work and somebody who I was tabling with -- can't remember who she was, anyways, but said to me "Why are you all dressed up? You're an artist!" (laughter) As if I shouldn't be wearing a tie and whatever, slacks and button-down shirt, so I was -- I mean, I did hang out with -- there was a guy Rain -- gosh, there was this tall guy. I forgot his other name. Anyways. There were some of the anarchist folks who I would run into, like on the bus, and talk to and stuff. There were some of the anarchist folks who I would run into, like on

the bus and talk to and stuff, but I think I was too -- I think I smelled too establishment for them in a way, or whatever.

COLLINGS

Tell me about this anarchist group.

LINTON

They basically -- I mean, they were kind of -- they all wore black and they did scavenging and stuff. They were like, oh, let's dumpster dive, so I wasn't ready for that. And they would actually go to the farmer's market on Fridays and get leftover food and then cook food for -- I believe we served food on Sunday mornings. I forget, exactly. So there would be, like, cooking parties. They all lived in a big, like -- well, I shouldn't say all of them. A bunch of them lived in a big kind of anarchist house, so I would go over there sometimes and help prepare food for Food Not Bombs, but it wasn't -- I think, whatever, I think that my -- culturally, I wasn't quite in that milieu as much.

COLLINGS

Did they have a (inaudible) political position, it sounds like?

LINTON

Yeah, although they were -- I mean, LBACI was definitely about, OK, we're incremental, getting people elected and stuff, whereas Food Not Bombs was a little more -- actually, some of them were car-free and stuff, and like I would run into them on the bus and stuff, but they were a little more like drop-out and do your... Oh, there was this organic gardening group that some of them were part of, whatever, where we would -- it's called Long Beach Organic, where there was this big vacant lot near Signal Hall, actually, near the hospital where I worked. And we converted that into a community garden and did tons of mulching and chipping (laughter) and stuff like that. Anyways, and...

COLLINGS

That doesn't sound very anarchic.

LINTON

Well, but it's sort of this very do-it-yourself culture. I mean, it's funny because there's a lot of -- I'm around people in that culture -- there's a good friend of mine, Federico, who lives here at Eco-Village who's very, like, sew your own clothes, build your own bike, and I'm not -- I mean, I -- whatever, I can fix basic stuff on my bike, but I don't -- there's a thing called the Bicycle Kitchen where a lot of these guys go to and, you know, take cast-off bikes and rehab them and it's like, when something's seriously wrong with a bike, I take it to the bike shop and I get it fixed. So I'm not -- I'm not quite as -- whatever. I mean, I do have a sense of there -- I mean, there's different approaches. There's, like, let's get a park built. Do we just go and cut down the fence and plant our own trees and whatever, or do we knock on the doors at City Hall and line up funding and get the city to build it, and I tend to be the second of those

approaches, of assuming that we can be more -- well, I don't want to dis the other approach, whatever. I mean, I think it's good to have multiple approaches. I think that Malcolm X made Martin Luther King much more effective, so I think having different people out there pushing in different ways is excellent and necessary. But...

COLLINGS

Now, are you aware of whether this anarchist group worked with other groups in the L.A. area or were they just sort of kind of on their own? The reason I think of it is because I was talking with Ruth Lansford of the Friends of the Ballona Wetlands, and as she described the Wetlands Action Network, it sounded like there was sort of an anarchist component there, and I was wondering if...

LINTON

Well, there were definitely -- I remember this one, like a gathering thing, like there would be Green Party gatherings and some of them were involved in Green Party. I mean, I think that they were hooked into different sort of activist networks in L.A. I mean, it's not -- anarchist doesn't mean, you know, whatever, no structure. I think it means no structure that, whatever, you build your own structure, kind of. But I actually don't -- well, I know them that well. It was a circle that I was on the periphery of, and some -- whatever. I think it was something -- it was a group of people who thought not having a car was, of course, that's the way to do it. It's living very cheap, and stuff, a lot of them. I mean, it's clever, whatever. I mean, I shouldn't say it's clever, even. It harkens back to, whatever, thousands of years ago or something. You had to make your own clothes, you had to do your own transportation, you had to catch your own food, whatever, and so it's not as -- whatever. It makes a lot of sense, I think, although as a suburban white kid, it -- you know, some of it was a little bit...

COLLINGS

Took a little getting used to.

LINTON

Yeah. Yeah. But...

COLLINGS

So, at what point did you learn about Eco-Village?

LINTON

So, what happened was, I had got a supervisor who I wasn't getting along with at the hospital at Long Beach, and I'd been recruited by a couple hospitals, one in New York, and one in San Francisco, and thought -- anyways, had also had a call from Children's Hospital to do kind of moonlighting for them, and so I was looking at -- so I was actually considering going to New York. They had actually made me an offer and everything, and then I thought, well, let me check with L.A. and see if that's closer to my mom and my family and my

brothers and sisters and stuff, but whatever. So I checked in with these folks that I had done a little bit of moonlighting for, and they offered me a job and so I started commuting, actually, from Long Beach. It would take an hour and a half on the train and bus and it was -- it was actually good. I did a lot of drawing and a lot of reading, but I didn't -- I definitely wasn't able to spend as much time on, like, activism in Long Beach and stuff, so it was clear that I was going to move to L.A. I mean, and I had expected that, whatever, but I hadn't immediately moved, so I started looking around for places, and I was kind of looking at places in Silverlake and I definitely wanted to live without a car because I had been doing that already for five years and I -- so I was looking around for places, and another -- an environmentalist, Regina, and I don't remember her last name, had taken a tour of Eco-Village and said, well, if you're looking at moving up to L.A., You should check out this Eco-Village thing, and I actually took a note at the time and I didn't think about it too much, but I had been looking around at -- well, I actually was looking at some places in Silverlake and I was also looking at some artists' lots downtown, and where I had lived in Long Beach was -- it was like a storefront which was sort of an artist's loft inside, whatever, but it was also in a neighborhood and there were lots of kids and I had a ping pong table in my place and all these young Latinos would come over and play ping pong and do art and stuff like that, yeah, so it was -- so I had both, at like funky space, high ceilings and everything, but I also was in a neighborhood and so as I was looking at places in L.A., I was finding, you know, housing-type space in a neighborhood or lofts that were in a wasteland in a way, and that were actually not that transit-friendly, whatever. There was a lot that I actually really liked. They had a big outdoor garden space in downtown L.A. that was near the L.A. River, actually, anyways, near Santa Fe and the Ten freeway, is that? Anyway, it's near Santa Fe and, like, Olympic. But it was a mile from the nearest bus stop or something, or maybe a little bit less. But it was just like, and there was nobody living around there, it felt like, in '96, and so I came to Eco-Village to visit and there were people without cars, there were people gardening, and actually at the time I was -- I had on the roof of where I was living in Long Beach, I had a big garden and I was also gardening some at this organic garden, community garden place, and so I just felt more -- actually, it's funny. So I talked to Lois, and I said I might be interested in living here, and she showed me -- they were just in the process of acquiring the building next door at 117, and it was thrashed, and looked awful, and I said, you know, well, where might I live if I was going to come to Eco-Village, and she showed me a unit in that building. I think it was actually even before, before CRSP [Cooperative Resources and Services Project] had purchased the building. It's right around that time, because I think they were -- I think they had already bought it by the time I moved into the neighborhood, but

I think when I first was looking, they hadn't yet bought it and I remember my heart sinking, like oh god, I can't live in it. It was like thrashed and small and I was used to these funky art spaces, and I was like, I don't want to live in that building! So, I ended up first moving into a fourplex on White House Place.

COLLINGS

Those are some nice buildings down there.

LINTON

Yeah. It was actually a Korean landlord, and it was mostly South Korean families in the two buildings that he owns, and I lived there from '96 to 2000. CRSP [Cooperative Resources and Services Project] purchased this building, I believe, in '99 and I was -- there's a woman I was dating at the time, Michelle Mascarenhas, who's a food activist and so we were planning on moving in together, and so we felt like it would be good for us to have a space that wasn't her moving into my space or me moving into her space. So that's when we arranged to move into this. So, I've been living here since '99, but yeah, I think -- so Eco-Village, it's -- I'm a little bit mixed on Eco-Village. I don't want to dis it too much, but I moved up here thinking, OK, I'm going to work really hard for Eco-Village and that'll be kind of my environmental cause, and I had a lot of conflict with Lois. I found it difficult to get -- to feel like my energy was appreciated and was going toward -- was actually moving things forward. For a while, I wasn't -- I mean, I would still come to, like, potlucks and some events and stuff, but I wasn't really participating very much. I mean, there was a point early on where I was helping rehab units and all kinds of stuff, and then I kind of -- I mean, Lois and I have a lot of differences. I mean, I tend to be an incrementalist and say, OK, what can we do now. And Lois, I mean, there's this streets project that we're working on that's...

COLLINGS

That sounds like a great project.

LINTON

Yeah, so it's like -- what's been tricky is to be...

COLLINGS

Could you describe the project?

LINTON

Yeah. So, it's called Shared Streets. It actually grew out of a -- there was a councilwoman Jackie Goldberg's office, initiated what's called -- a specific plan that's called the Station Neighborhood Area Plan, that called for increased density around transit stops along the red line, in this neighborhood, and then also traffic calming within existing neighborhoods to favor pedestrianization and slow cars down, and so we -- that idea appealed to me a lot. I'd been reading -- I mean, I'd been bicycling and reading a lot about kind of urbanism and how to get people out of their cars and part of it is to kind of foster,

whatever, to make it safer and greener and stuff for pedestrians and less easy for cars to speed through. So, we worked with the Councilman's office and the DOT and whatnot and actually wrote most of the application to get the MTA for funding and we got funding approved in -- I think we put in the application in 2000. I mean, and we did a bunch of the work in '99 to kind of outreach to the neighborhood, and we had a big kind of planning session in the street and had people give input on what they wanted. I mean, it was mostly Eco-Villagers but it was also some Korean and some Spanish-speaking neighbors, and so we did an application and we got funded, although it was near the low end of the funded ones, so it was funded in 2001 with 2005 funds, so -- and then the state didn't have as much money, so it got pushed back and we didn't really push for it politically, which could've moved it up potentially but anyways, I got busy with other things, but there's actually a designers meetings this Thursday to look at so-called final designs, although we've looked at what was supposed to be final designs and we didn't like them. (laughter) So we'll see.

COLLINGS

What didn't you like about it?

LINTON

Well, they'd actually looked at -- so, we're looking at doing -- looking at making the street better for pedestrians. We're got -- we've got two lanes of parking, and two travel lanes, and they'd actually looked at removing a lane of parking and giving only a little of that space to, like, giving like two feet of the seven feet that's allocated to parking to pedestrians and the other five feet of it to cars that are coming into our neighborhood, so we were actually in some ways widening the street for cars, which is not...

COLLINGS

Is just the opposite of...

LINTON

Yeah, exactly. We're just going in the wrong direction. So that was the problem with the last design. And it's also sort of a -- I mean, in some ways -- I don't park, whatever. I'm not a big fan of parking. But parking is an amenity for local residents, and widened streets is an amenity more favoring pass-through traffic, whatever, favoring people who don't live here. So I felt like it's sort of -- I mean, we discussed it. Well, this was the hard part, like, Lois is like let's put a lake in the street and let's close it and let's, you know, whatever -- you know, very idealistic, kind of what I call a "whole-hogger," whatever. It's like a term from the 1800's about somebody who was for temperance 100 percent and no exceptions.

COLLINGS

Is that where the expression "whole hog" comes from?

LINTON

I think so. It's from Christmas Carol, is where I learned it, reading Charles Dickens.

COLLINGS

That's interesting that you should make the analogy with a temperance word. Very nice.

LINTON

But it's sort of like, I think that -- I mean, I think that if we -- I kind of, my mental calculation is that we can probably -- and parking's pretty tight on this street, but at the same time, the census shows that we have something like 56 percent of people on the street, many of whom are seniors and children, who don't have a car. So it's actually -- we in this census tract, our majority doesn't use that street for driving or parking, so I think we can get away with taking away 10 to 20 percent of parking and if we get more landscaping, more sidewalk, sort of miniparks and a safer, beautiful street, and whereas I think Lois tends to put out things like, oh, let's take away all the parking, you know. Let's make our street car-free and it's like, eh, I don't think -- I mean, I'm not opposed to that, personally, but I think that makes for a -- a project that will, whatever, potentially courts like a backlash and...

COLLINGS

Some of the neighbors wouldn't like that.

LINTON

Yeah, exactly. A lot of the neighbors wouldn't like that, so anyways -- so it's stuff like that where it's sort of -- the other thing is, Lois -- like, I tend to think, OK, if we can get the city to build this project here, and if it's successful, it's something the city can do in other neighborhoods. And if we do -- Lois tends to say, oh, well, let's do it for half the price and all the neighbors will do it and we'll just get -- we'll pour the concrete ourselves and (inaudible) and it's like, that may be less replicable, and the idea of taking away all the parking is even less replicable in other neighborhoods too, so I think I'm more conscious of a shorter horizon of saying, you know, what can we do, kind of within existing constraints in the next three or four years, versus -- in the next, you know, three or four years versus what's -- I don't want to call it utopian or whatever -- what's idealistic and, you know...

COLLINGS

Who was the spokesman for this project?

LINTON

Well, that's another thing that's tricky. I mean, something -- in some ways, I am, but I mean, it's not -- we don't - well, it's another issue I have with Lois. Lois is very willing to say "the community wants X," and I'm a lot more willing to say, "I think X would be appropriate. I'm in favor of X," so I'm not willing to

speak for the community relative to what we want in the shared streets. I'm willing to take information to the Eco-Village community, which isn't the whole community and get our buy-off on it, but there isn't a spokesperson, and I mean -- I think I was the -- you know, in '99 and 2000, when we were pushing for funding and stuff on the project and got the MTA funding, I was certainly the lead, you know, volunteer on the project, but I mean, it's not -- I don't think that I have the, whatever. I don't think that gives me authority to say this is what's in it and this is what's not. I mean, I think it's important to have an open process with dialogue and input and from Eco-Villagers and neighbors, whatever.

COLLINGS

So who will meet with the designers on Thursday?

LINTON

Lois, they called Lois and said we'd like to meet with you, and Lois e-mailed Eco-Village people and said "does anybody want to come to this?" So -- which I don't think's a very good process, frankly. I mean, I think there should be a meeting open to the community, but we tend to be -- we Eco-Village residents tend to somewhat swamp those meetings anyway in our neighborhood. (laughter)

COLLINGS

With sheer numbers.

LINTON

Yeah, so -- which is OK, whatever. I mean, it's not -- I'm not opposed to, whatever. There's some organizers who like, oh, you should just get people together and whatever they want to do, you should do. I have ecological and urban values that I'm pushing, but I want an open process that nobody feels like they weren't part of, you know, or weren't at least -- wasn't open to them.

COLLINGS

Are you the only person at Eco-Village who has your background in terms of neighborhood activism, as you described in Long Beach?

LINTON

Well, I think no. There's, I think, more -- of people who moved into Eco-Village to be part of it, more of us have activist backgrounds and they vary.

COLLINGS

But activism in the planning sense?

LINTON

I mean, I think like, Yuki from Communities for a Better Environment -- I mean, there's a bunch of folks who work for non-profits that do environmental work, that work on campaigns and projects and I don't -- I mean, all our flavors are a little different, and I think I've been, whatever, knee-deep in it a little longer than most people, but I mean, I don't -- I think it's -- trying to think of

who else has similar, whatever. There's Dore, who runs environmental programs for Korean Youth Community Center, and there's -- all these groups kind of weigh in on stuff in their areas. There's another guy Ron who is co-founder of the Bike Coalition with me. I mean, I think I'm unique among Eco-Villagers in many ways, but I think a lot of us have activist backgrounds that look at how do we make communities environmental, but I mean, different people -- Lara has worked with co-ops and stuff like that, so it's sort of different. It's all different shades but it's not that, whatever. I wouldn't say my experience is unique or exceptional.

COLLINGS

Is this project a done deal, or could it possibly crash because of some of these conflicts in terms of the vision?

LINTON

Oh, I think it could crash. Actually, there's a bike path project that just crashed, that the environmentalists couldn't get together on. It's a similar dynamic where the county -- I mean, yeah, there are deadlines on funding, and when a governmental agency commits to something and then comes to an impasse where they feel they can't show progress, sometimes they do forfeit the funds. I mean, I think that's unlikely, but it does happen.

COLLINGS

You think there'll be a compromise in this case?

LINTON

Yeah, I mean, I think that their plans will be better, but it's like, it's been really difficult for me to work on this project because -- I shouldn't say because. I become frustrated because I go to a meeting and we've kind of sat down with the city and said let's do X, Y, and Z and so -- and then they go back to the drawing board and they come back, and sometimes I find things that I'm frustrated with what they did, but we come back to the table and Lois said, "Oh, let's do a lake, and let's close this, and let's" -- you know, and it sort of -- we actually had discussions of let's close the street in '99, and we looked at -- as a community, we looked at -- I expressed that, if we close the street, (a) it takes a year to get the permit to do that, so it would make the project longer and we thought it was right around the corner, and (b) it's probably not that replicable in other neighborhoods and stuff, and we were looking at this broad -- not that broad, whatever -- community-wide plan, like a four-mile linear plan for a corridor, anyways. And we made certain trade-offs saying, OK, we think we think we can get rid of this much parking. We think we can -- and I kind of led a process of -- you know, probably what I should've done is documented that really well and then just pull it out when Lois says let's do a lake, and say "look, the community consensed on this," but I mean, it's just tricky because it feels like we kind of have parameters and then it's still like all over the board

and it's a lot of energy to try to rein that in and move the project forward and it's still -- it's still messy, and it's not -- it's also sort of -- sorry, there's a lot of baggage here. (laughter) But I mean, I worked for the city for two years, for Councilman Reyes, and there are ways of doing things where you have the city build it and then you plant other trees, whatever. And it's like the city has a law that says you can't plant fruit trees as street trees, and yet, we go into a meeting and every time Lois says, "Oh, you've got to plant fruit trees," and every time I say, well, can we plant half the trees and then you guys look the other way and we'll plant fruit trees, and yet every time Lois -- well, I should say every time. Many times, Lois is telling the bureaucrats, who can't -- I call it "the person who can't say yes." (laughter) It's like telling the person who can't say yes, "You need to do X," and there's no way. It's like, illegal in terms of -- I mean, the city staff is not going to break the law no matter how many times you tell them that you think they should. (laughter) So there's sort of a -- I feel frustrated in those situations, like -- so anyways. And I don't disagree with Lois, but I want to take that concern and say, OK, how do I get fruit trees in with the least headache and make it happen? And it's not telling city staff that they need to plant fruit trees. It's telling City Staff leave these areas unplanted and when you're done we'll come in and plant fruit trees. There's ways to do it that are not that hard, so anyways. But it's sort of -- I find it difficult.

COLLINGS

What's your view on that LAUSD property on the corner? Do you have a position on that?

LINTON

Well, I'm actually really -- that was one of the things that -- that's another thing that I'm very frustrated with Lois about. I mean, we actually cut a deal with the school district and Jackie Goldberg's office where Lois was supposed to work with the CRA to purchase that building, and Lois didn't follow up once it was kind of out of danger. That was in, gosh, '97 or something? And then, you know, school district had elections and the new president came in and the school district was not going to endorse, saying we're going to tear it down and we were all aghast that the agreement to save it had all fallen through, but we said, "OK, let's roll that rock up the hill again together," and we formed a committee, the Eco-Villagers. It must have been, like, 2000 or 2001. And we've kind of formulated a strategy on what we're going to do and Lois -- we decided to look specifically at political pressure, on [inaudible] and we were meeting each week and we had certain tasks that we were going to follow up on that we agreed to, and Lois would go off each week and do all these things completely different than what we had come up with as a team. She spent all this time on trying to get the building declared historic and it's like -- we had kind of said -- and we had looked at different strategies and said, well, let's start with this one,

and she had just gone off the page and done all her own things, and there was a point where I just said, look -- and hadn't followed up on things that she had said she would, so it was like, if you're not going to -- and that wasn't the first time. There was actually a whole -- when the building was first purchased -- anyways, I'll finish the LAUSD thing quick and then go to the other example, but so, I just said, look, if you're not willing to operate as a team, then you should do this by yourself and I don't need to be involved in it. But a similar thing had happened when our first manager, handyman person left not long after we purchased the building, whatever, like three or four months in. We had a group at that time of like five folks who were the building committee. I mean, now the building committee is still called the building committee although it's like the community meeting. But has 20 or 30, anyways, but we would meet and figure out what needed to be done on the building and so the manager left and Lois said, oh, I don't think we need a new manager. We'll just all do it as volunteers and we'll get done whatever needs to get done and we have a lot -- there's a lot of knowledge among us, and we don't need a building manager. And there were five people in the room and Lois, and all five of us said no. We need a manager. We don't want to get called at 2 a.m. I don't want to get called at 2 a.m. when there's a toilet stopped up, whatever. You need a manager and yes, tap into volunteers and cultivate them, but let's hire a manager. And Lois was like, no. Lois prevailed and the building committee within a month ceased to exist because it was really clear to all of us that it didn't matter what we said. And then three months later, Lois was exhausted by having to unclog toilets at 3 a.m. and said, "Oh, I think we need to hire a manager." But I mean, it's frequently the case that Lois gets an idea in her head and doesn't really listen to -- is not a team player, basically says no, this is what I've decided and it doesn't matter what the community wants or what this medium I'm in wants. So I mean, I find that really deflating of efforts, whatever, of trying to work together on things because it's sort of -- she just does what she wants and doesn't listen. And maybe that's what it takes to be a visionary and to do something that doesn't exist.

COLLINGS

That's what I was going to ask you. Does a group like this need a visionary leader who is on fire? Or maybe they only need a person like that at a certain point?

LINTON

That's what I would say, is that to bring an organization from zero to one requires a certain energy that's not necessarily the same energy to bring it from one to two to seven to three hundred, you know, and I think that there's a lot of Friends of the L.A. River, Eco-Village, there are a lot of -- Bus Riders' Union -- there are a lot of founders who are strong-willed, creative, visionary individuals

who don't always create structures that will sustain themselves in the absence of a founder.

COLLINGS

That's an interesting subject.

LINTON

(laughter) Yeah.

COLLINGS

We're at 55 minutes and I know you always say that you only have an hour. Do you want to stop now?

LINTON

Yeah, I think we should stop now, because I've got to...

COLLINGS

You've got to go.

LINTON

Yeah, I've got to get a bite to eat really quick and then go.

1.3. Session 3 (June 19, 2007)

COLLINGS

OK, today is June 19th, 2007, Jane Collings interviewing Joe Linton at his home, and Joe, we were going to start talking about your involvement with Friends of the LA River, but I just wondered if you would want to follow up with how the Shared Streets meeting went last Thursday, because we had sort of ended up talking about that project.

LINTON

Yeah, I think too, weren't we going to mention the Arroyo Seco Bike Path project?

COLLINGS

Yes, indeed. I was going to ask you about that.

LINTON

So the Shared Streets meeting. It went pretty well. I actually was running around to get this clean-up event ready that happened on Saturday, so I didn't -- I had to skip our early, but yeah, we're working on finalizing some of the designs, working with the city to finalize designs for traffic coning, greening, pedestrianization project on the street, and basically there's a drainage issue with the Eco-Village that we need to look at. The way rainwater comes out in the street, there's actually a pipe that runs from the courtyard that puts excess rainwater onto the street.

COLLINGS

Now, wasn't there a project at one time to -- is that over there on the far end of the Eco-Village site? Wasn't there a project to take out some of that asphalt along the side of the building and have the water drain?

LINTON

That's the thing we call the Northside Garden. We did a native plant garden and reformed the north side of the building to soak in more water and slough off less water, and so -- but it's not -- it's actually -- this, the drain that's -- that was draining to the back of the building, (inaudible) and there is some drain there but it overflowed and it ended up flooding the strip mall that was built behind it that's kind of at a low spot. So, we've done a little bit of looking at some storm water stuff, but not -- in a big storm we still have some small issues. And it's more on the strip mall that was built after our building was, not taking into account that (inaudible). In some ways, the buildings that were built in the 20's (inaudible) but...

COLLINGS

So is this why Lois wants a lake? (laughter)

LINTON

Yeah, I mean -- basically, it went pretty well, just because it was focused on resolving certain details, but Lois was sort of saying, oh, we can catch all that storm water. We don't need an outlet. We can run water -- basically, if you don't put some sort of outlet, we end up having the potential of having storm water running across the sidewalk, of focusing storm water and running it across the sidewalk, and that's a liability issue that I don't think we or the city necessarily want. And even in nature, there's an outlet usually. Well, I guess like Mono Lake there isn't, but the rivers -- not all storm water soaks in, and nature designs systems where water infiltrates but then water runs off, and so we need to figure out how that runoff will work with this project.

COLLINGS

OK, so it sounds like things are moving along in a satisfactory fashion.

LINTON

Yeah. Do you want me to talk about the Arroyo Seco?

COLLINGS

Yeah, why don't you go ahead? Because we were going to pick up the...

LINTON

Yeah. That's been a frustrating process, actually. There was -- the county -- there's a short bike path in the Arroyo Seco that exists today, and the county got funding to extend that, and they had initially proposed putting the bike path along the top of the channel and it's a tributary of the L.A. River. It's concreted in the area where the bike path was funded. They had initially proposed putting the bike path along the top of the channel, which would have taken out a bunch of trees that had been planted by Northeast Trees and folks trying to green the

Arroyo Seco, and so a few advocates had pushed, at the time we heard about this, running the (inaudible) proposed, running it down in the channel and for environmental reasons the county said "OK, we'll listen to you and we'll put it in the channel." The process wasn't very broad at that point. They had kind of shared it with some folks and we had said do it differently, and they had responded, which was good, but when they published their final plans to put in the channel, other activists -- largely a guy named Tim Brick, who's the head of a thing called the Arroyo Seco Foundation -- said, "You're putting more concrete in the Arroyo Seco. For environmental reasons, don't do it that way." And it ended up being -- I mean, what was frustrating actually was that the county -- I think that -- I mean, the environmentalists weren't all on the same page, but it was more or less like ten to one, I think, or something. It was a large majority saying this isn't restoration, this isn't perfect, but this will take an inaccessible closed-off area and open it up to bicycling and whatever. This has some goods and it's not everything we're looking for, but some people, largely Tim Brick, opposed it and the county I think wasn't -- I mean, at some point, we should've. Well, I'm trying to blame the county when I shouldn't, whatever. The county ended up not building it and giving the money back, because they felt like whatever they did they were going to be criticized. So we were unable to build a consensus on the enviro side.

COLLINGS

Have you found particular people that you've worked with in the county that have been particularly prone to see your point of view, real allies?

LINTON

I mean, some. At the time, the person -- the elected officials tend to be more responsive, some of them. I mean, some of them aren't. And then the city bureaucrats tend to be pretty -- (inaudible) bureaucrat. As much as I (inaudible) with the city staff, they tend to be a little less forward-thinking or whatever, tend to be sort of "this is how we've done it and we don't want to change that," so...

COLLINGS

Because I know Dorothy Green was talking about how people that she had worked with within government and particularly engineers over the years, over a 20, 30 year span had -- she found that as a rule, were becoming more environmentally aware and easier to work with.

LINTON

Yeah, I would say that's true overall. I mean, it feels like still that it's sort of -- I mean, and there are some. I mean, and I think of like Carl Blum and stuff, who was the head of County Public Works.

COLLINGS

Who worked with Andy Lipkis on the storm water project. Exactly.

LINTON

(inaudible) So there's some converts that do get it, and there are some people within the system that are trying to do really good things too. I mean, I don't want to dismiss everyone. But it's like, when -- I don't know. The leadership, in some ways, like the innovation or doing things that are a little bit outside of the box, even that have been done in a hundred other cities, tends to come from advocacy groups and not from within the civil servant establishment.

COLLINGS

So in this particular case, the people that you were working with at the county just couldn't resolve the dispute between the Arroyo Seco foundation and the...

LINTON

And a half-dozen other groups that were pushing for the project as redesigned, yeah.

COLLINGS

So they just pulled out.

LINTON

Yeah. Well, they ended up -- and they were facing a deadline to say "you need to turn in final plans and make progress on this or you lose the grant." And they ended up losing the grant.

COLLINGS

So what -- do you have any idea what the feeling of Tim Brick and the Arroyo Seco Foundation was as a result of that, whether they saw that as a triumph?

LINTON

Oh, I think he saw it as a victory, yeah. I mean, and Tim's a friend. He's a good person and he's got the right interest in mind and stuff like that, but I think in some ways -- he lives in Pasadena. He's very much about naturalizing the Arroyo, which is easier to do upstream than it is to do downstream, because there's less tight development, and he's holding out for a project that really removes concrete from the Arroyo and naturalizes it, which I wholly support also, so I don't meant to cast him in a bad light or whatever, but...

COLLINGS

Are you finding that your incrementalist view tends to put you at odds with other advocacy groups that you work with?

LINTON

I mean, now and then, yeah. I mean, I think that -- I think I'm much more willing to sort of compromise and get something done, and I think that there are often people who have been at it for longer who have kind of sunk in their heels and said this is the only way it can be. But I mean, I don't mean to characterize -- those folks have done a lot of good, so I don't mean to characterize them negatively. I mean, I don't think it's -- I think we need people to dig in their heels. That's (inaudible) should be, but yeah, at times. I mean, I think

everything's different. There's times when I'm pushing for something to be more -- there's the North Spring Street Bridge project that's an old 1927 bridge that the city wants to widen from, like, 50 feet wide to 90 feet wide, and I think they should, whatever. In the case of car capacity or parking capacity, I tend to be on the don't give up an inch side, but not completely uncompromising, and I think other environmentalists tend to drive and tend to not see a wider road as such a horrible thing as I see it.

COLLINGS

Well, there seems to be a bit of a contradiction here. On the one hand, you have, as you characterized it last time, an incrementalist view in terms of dealing with the city and the county, but on the other hand you believe that an environmental activist should live as they preach, so to speak. So you sort of have these two threads running, which is interesting.

LINTON

Well, I think it's -- there's an Alice Walker quote that I actually really like. (inaudible) with her. I think that if we want to bring another world into being, we need to try to live in that world to the extent that's possible in our world today. And I don't think that contradiction is such a bad thing, whatever, that we should be able to hold kind of multiple truths. But I think that wanting -- you know, holding myself to living a certain way, strongly, and only insisting that a bureaucracy take a couple of steps at a time, I see those as OK. I don't think I could -- I want to be effective and I want to (inaudible) build momentum by actually achieving things, so I think it's OK to have those -- with those small steps comes momentum and understanding and that fosters further progress, I think.

COLLINGS

Yeah, OK, that's a good way of putting it. So, just sort of touching back a little bit, we do need to get on to the Friends of the LA River, but we were talking a little bit about Eco-Village last time, and I wondered if you would describe any changes that have occurred in the culture or the structure in the ten years, little over ten years that you've been involved?

LINTON

Well, I think that there's -- let's see. I think that the -- I mean, I think that some of the problems are still around, but I think as we've -- gradually, Eco-Village has sort of grown in number, and in growing in number that has brought more people who are involved and who are initiating different things and bringing different ways of accomplishing things and approaching things, and I think that that breadth has taken -- has made some conflicts inherent a little less prominent, that if there's only four or five active people, and two of them can't agree, it's harder to move forward, and if there's 30 active people and two of them don't agree, somebody else will figure out how to move on something. So

I think there's more -- I think there's a better sense of -- we'll call it "multiple centers of initiative," that you don't have to spend three hours processing stuff at a meeting before you take out a fence, whatever. Especially before you do something that's not reversible, that you should just go ahead and talk with people about it, try it, and that that's OK, and I think we would've spent -- ten years ago, we would've spent two weeks talking about the fence and six months coming to a fence policy and now, it's like there are people who just say, "You know, I'm thinking about taking out this fence, and if any of you wants to come down on Saturday, we'll do it, and if anybody doesn't like it, we'll put it back," and it's like, it's probably a good way to do it, because it's not -- it's not a -- I tend to be a pretty rules person, like wanting everybody to know about stuff and wanting us to agree on something before we do it, but I think it's kind of good. There's a guy, Federico, who's sort of a Colombian anarchist punker, you know, who's kind of very do-it-yourself and it's good to have -- whatever, just to have different ways of approaching things.

COLLINGS

Now, do you tend to have a number of -- it sounds like there are a number of people who are involved in Eco-Village who have a professional life as an environmental activist or activist as well? Is that something that has -- I mean -- that has grown over the years?

LINTON

Yeah, I think -- I mean, I'm not sure that it's, like, people have come here who weren't -- well, actually, I did -- who weren't professional activists and became professional, you know, maybe not their paid career. But yeah, there's a lot of folks who work in non-profits. There's teachers. There's a couple others. There's one person who works for a councilmember and somebody like that. So there are -- yeah, you know, it varies. Like, there's nurse, there's -- I mean, I guess all those are -- it's not -- plenty of people who are involved in their -- I mean, there are some students. I'm trying to think of, what do we all do? Like, bike messenger. So there are plenty -- there are quite a few of us who work for non-profits and then we sort of recruit each other and stuff like that.

COLLINGS

And perhaps you bring some of those skills into the -- running the Eco-Village and the negotiations that take place at Eco-Village.

LINTON

Well, I think it works both ways, too. I mean, I was at a meeting of a thing called Green L.A. that's sort of a coalition of heads -- or mostly not heads, but the environmental and environmental justice organizations in L.A., and kind of brought some of our, like, consensus decision-making to this meeting and stuff, where there was sort of a split, so I think our non-profit and urban work affects

-- comes back to the Eco-Village and our Eco-Village work comes back to our community.

COLLINGS

So what is the consensus process at Eco-Village?

LINTON

We use -- I mean, a lot of groups typically use Robert's Rules of Order and voting and quorum and whatnot for making decisions. We use a quorum, actually, but we make decisions by consensus and a lot of groups, a lot of kind of anarchists and intentional communities and eco -- many eco groups like Green Party and stuff use this, although many like Friends of the L.A. River or Bike Coalition or Livable Places don't. They use, like, Robert's Rules of Order, but consensus, I mean, there's a lot written on consensus. But the sense is that if we vote on an issue, potentially we have 51 percent of us who feel good about it and 49 percent who feel awful about it, and then it can be difficult to implement and if we are able to come up with something that everyone in the room can stand for, can consense upon, then we'll have more energy and a richer proposal to implement, and it tends to a take a little longer on the front end, but on the back end you really have everybody's buyoff and you're not trying to -- and you've hopefully, we've hopefully incorporated the concerns of folks who wouldn't have initially supported the proposal to the point where we've got a proposal that everybody can support.

COLLINGS

So you keep going until you have, for the most part, consensus on any given issue.

LINTON

Yeah. There's a thing called a "stand-aside" and there's a thing called the "block," and if there's an actual block, if somebody feels that for a reason of related to the community's values and not just to that person's preferences, that this proposal goes against those community values, they -- and individual can say "I'm blocking this," that I feel this consensus is wrong for the group, and then you don't move ahead for a while.

COLLINGS

Until that block is resolved.

LINTON

Right, and hopefully you work with them, that person, and tweak the proposal and achieve a compromise (inaudible). There's also a thing called the stand-aside where somebody says, "I'm not really for this, but I'm OK with it moving forward," but those are both pretty rare at Eco-Village. I mean...

COLLINGS

And does there tend to be any negotiation, like "I'll go with you on this one, but I expect you to go with me on that one?"

LINTON

I mean, a little bit, but not in a sense of like a lot of city council stuff is like vote-trading. So it tends to be more like, I think we should really be doing X, but because you're concerned with this I'm willing to scale it back, or whatever. I mean, it tends to not -- you tend to not -- I mean, I've never heard of any at Eco-Village, like, of one vote on one position for a vote on another on the vote committee. But I mean, there's certainly -- we had a decision last night about short stays. We were having a funky issue where -- we frequently have a situation where somebody comes and stays for a month or two months, three months or six months, and they frequently decide that they want to stay longer and we end up not having, I think -- I mean, Chris is here because let him have a short stay here. We've got three short-stays already in the building in their own units, and Chris, so we've got four right now. And we had trouble, where we had a couple with kids come out to L.A. from Memphis and I agreed to give them a short stay and weren't -- they were hoping to move in and stay. So anyways, they ended up moving back to Memphis and not being that comfortable with L.A., but there was some conflict and some difficulty and there was a lot of pressure for us to say at the end of the month, to say "OK, you're in because you don't have a place to live in L.A.," and whatever, so we've sort of -- we're trying to not -- it became -- this is a long story, but the short story is...

COLLINGS

No, it sounds very interesting.

LINTON

In some ways, short stays become like a short-circuit of the actual membership process, and so if somebody comes and lives here for three months, gets to know everybody, more likely than not they get in, whatever, and some of the best people in the community came in that way. There's the guy Jimmy [Lizama]who started the bicycle kitchen, and Yuki [Kudikoro], who works for the Communities for a Better Environment. I mean, there's some really good people who we approved as short stays who then decided that they wanted to stay here.

COLLINGS

So you're saying that you're for a touchback provision. (laughter)

LINTON

Yeah, so -- I think it's really delicate, because I think it's actually good for us to rope in some of these good folks in L.A. by winning them into a short stay and then keeping them, but at the same time it's been really difficult especially with out-of-town folks, so we kind of said we weren't going to -- what's funny is, we discussed this but we didn't actually set it as a policy, so it's sort of this standing issue but it's unresolved in some ways. So we said we were going to -- and so,

let me back up just slightly. So what happened was, we started to have really big discussions on short stays, because we were assuming that, well, this person may well get in easily, so we should be (inaudible) their short stay to make sure they're good, and then it's like, wow, we're spending an hour on this person who's going to be here for two weeks, or something. So, we decided -- or I shouldn't say we decided. We discussed and provisionally kind of used this as a policy, but we haven't actually approved this policy, so that we would only approve short stays of folks who were not intending to become permanent members, so the situation we were having last night was a person who was here in the past for five years, who was involved and active and a member in good standing, left and went to New York for three years, got married and went with his wife there. They got a divorce and he came back. He moved in and said, "Oh, I'm not really intending to be a member," and we said OK, no problem, put him on short stay. And then in three months, he said, "Oh, I want to be a member," and we were sort of -- some folks are saying, well, he should move out and re-enter the process. Some folks are saying he should -- we already know him and we should just let him in, so it's a little bit tricky and yet we don't -- whatever, because of the awkwardness of some of the short stays wanting to be here and not having a lot of options. So what we approved was that we extended his short stay by three months, and we said that doesn't really establish a precedent, but there were some folks who wanted to be more explicit about that we reserve the right to not extend the short stay again, and it's like, in other words -- we always had that right. We don't need to make any more -- we don't need to put whatever to strain this relationship that we have with him, whatever, and it's already tricky and he knows it's tricky and whatever. We're open with him about it, what issues (inaudiuble).

COLLINGS

Now, why would somebody need to leave and sort of re-enter the process. Is there a waiting list?

LINTON

Some, yeah. There's -- that's actually another issue contendent to -- there are -- there's about a half-dozen people that are candidates right now, and we tend to -- the minimum time we request somebody is three months, and we're trying to put a maximum of six months to actually -- we want to have people come here and be involved in stuff, sort of as they're entering the process, so we get to know them, they get to know us, and so we do have a pretty extended process (inaudible). And at times there's a (inaudible) waiting list, but right now, there's actually -- there's all these short stays, which indicate empty units in a way. And there are a bunch of people in line to get in.

COLLINGS

So the concern with the short stays kind of grandfathering in is that they perhaps change the culture of Eco-Village in unintended ways?

LINTON

Yeah. So there's also -- there's a -- you'd call it, like a schism or a conflict. There's a difference of approaches in accepting members, and Lois and I stand at the poles of it. Surprise, surprise! (laughter) And I tend to think that if we have a wonderful, vibrant, active culture of participation, that new people will walk in and will absorb that culture largely, and contribute to it, whatever, not that they won't bring something to it. And the contrast to that is Lois feels like we need to be really screening people and finding individuals who are already highly versed in conflict resolution and permaculture and community living and whatnot, and so -- and I mean, the truth is somewhere in-between those. We shouldn't be letting in just everybody, and we shouldn't be screening so tightly that we never get anybody in. But I tend to -- you know, I tend to think this person's interested and there's no way that us hanging around with them for three months and asking them some questions that we're going to be able to screen out who's really good and who's really bad, and there's people who -- I mean, there's Jimmy Lizama, who started the Bike Kitchen, who's actually not -- it's funny, there's these people on the periphery a little bit at Eco-Village who are -- he doesn't come to a lot of meetings. He doesn't come to that many potlucks, but he's great and he has fantastic energy and he started this Bike Kitchen and that's attracted Summer and Aurisha and Federico, so whatever. That's just been -- that's one of the best and diverse energies that we've had at Eco-Village since it started. It's the Bike Kitchen, anyways, and when Jimmy was applying Lois was concerned that -- here's someone who was very interested in bicycles that didn't have a car, which already is as Eco as you can get, as far as I'm concerned. But he didn't even know any permaculture or consensus or whatever. He didn't have a -- he wasn't part of this sort of -- I want to call it like upper class white permaculture eco-mode. His father immigrated from Honduras and he grew up in this neighborhood. He's just got great energy and it wasn't easy to get him accepted, and I think even Lois would say today that he brings a lot to Eco-Village, but he's not the mold that we would we were looking for in a way. So I think we need to be really careful about pre-conceiving what we're expecting.

COLLINGS

What's the average age at the moment?

LINTON

Around here it's like late twenties. I mean, there's a lot of -- there are a lot of folks not far out of college.

COLLINGS

OK, I was just wondering if that was an issue for Lois, perhaps. It sounded like there might be an issue of looking for people with more life experience. You mentioned the conflict resolution and background.

LINTON

Perhaps, although there are -- I mean, there are -- I mean, the contrast I would put -- and this is the person who was going to grad school at UCLA who was in his early 20's, this guy named T.H. who is a musician and has done all kinds of solar and composting toilets and was on the face of it, like, had everything you could be looking for -- it seemed like -- in an Eco-Villager, and he was so absorbed in all the 800 projects that we almost never saw his face here. I mean, and he was a good guy and people, whatever -- I don't begrudge him being here, but he wasn't -- on paper he looked like this is the perfect -- and Lois was like, "He's already an Eco-Villager," (inaudible), and so -- I think it's hard to tell on the way in whether -- how well somebody will fit, what kind of energy they'll bring, how involved they'll be, how many slots the have in their life to dedicate to community, and I think how they'll grow into it, too.

COLLINGS

When they come, is there any kind of like probationary period?

LINTON

Well, now there is. We just did a thing where we're accepting people for six months provisionally. In fact, the first members we just approved like a month ago for them to be full-fledged, in less than a year.

COLLINGS

And once they come, they tend to be approved after the six-month period?

LINTON

Well, we've only had one. So far we're one for one.

COLLINGS

OK. (laughter)

LINTON

Well, I expect that it's -- I mean, I think part of it is too, sometimes -- (inaudible) on their consensus. Sometimes new people come in and want to say, "Oh, I don't think we should be doing it this way," and what the provisional says basically is that they can't block for six months, and so it doesn't really -- I mean, most people don't block ever in their life, so it's not -- I don't think it's all that, whatever. It's not such a strong provisional thing anyway. I mean, they participate and it feels like they're full-fledged. I had forgotten, actually, that they hadn't been, you know, fully enabled. So...

COLLINGS

Well, this has been a really interesting discussion. Do want to get in, start talking about...

LINTON

The river?

COLLINGS

Yes, OK. I mean, because we only have now, like, 20 minutes. Why don't we just do a little intro to your work with Friends of the L.A. River?

LINTON

So let's see. I mean, I got involved in river stuff -- I think I talked about it (inaudible).

COLLINGS

You talked about how Lewis MacAdams had come and spoken and you talked about your early days riding your bike down to the sea.

LINTON

So, I got a taste for it when I was in Long Beach, and then in '96 I moved up to L.A. and the group met up here and stuff, and then I started going to more, attending meetings and was asked to join the Board of Directors and there was this bike (inaudible) called Critical Mass that happened on the last Friday of every month that I got involved in, and then I started thinking that that was a good -- basically just said, OK, here's where we're going to meet on this, at this time and people just show up. And so it was sort of like a way to organize a lot of people without putting out a lot of effort, and so I thought there could be sort of a similar way to organize people on the river, and that it would be -- like, Lewis MacAdams had always said, when people would say "Well, how do I get involved," he'd say "go down to the river and walk along it and see what it says to you." So kind of combining those, I started a series of walks along the river. It was in '98, '98 or '97. It was the third Sunday of each month. They're still happening. There was one yesterday, two days ago. And basically I would just go and scout out locations, where we're going to talk to the (inaudible) and different folks who knew about the river and got some locations and used places where we'd done clean-ups and whatnot, so -- but then I started to explore more and find other places that we perhaps hadn't, and tried to -- kept up with if there was a proposal to do something along Compton Creek, then I would try to steer in a walk along Compton Creek and stuff, so -- and a lot of times, too, I would get -- early on I would get kind of experts to come and talk. There was this guy Dan Cooper, who knows all about the birds, and there was the city bike program director who would talk about the bike path plans and stuff like that, so -- and early on, we didn't have a lot of people. The first block had two people, you know, so it had like five or six early on, and then there was a series of events that we did in conjunction with Occidental College, with what's now called the UEPI, the Urban Environmental Policy Institute. Different name -- then it was like the Pollution Prevention something. Anyways...

COLLINGS

With Robert Gottlieb?

LINTON

Yeah, with Bob Gottlieb. So, we had this big program from here, from mid-'99 to mid-2000, where we had historians talking about the river, poets doing poetry about the river and movie-makers talking about the river's role in movies and all sorts of different events over the course of the year, that had a big mayoral debate about the river as its concluding event, and whatnot. And as part of that, whatever, the walks were in the mix with all those events and we started getting more people at the walks and there was a big controversy over this site of the cornfield [Not a Cornfield] that's downtown. One of the walks was there. That was the biggest -- we had, like, 120 people at that, because it was -- people had heard about it, and didn't know where it was, so I kept doing those walks. I mean, I did those walks for about five years. Yeah, 2002, I started working for Councilman Reyes, working on river issues, but through having -- I mean, early on (inaudible), I would pull up a schedule, whatever, six months in advance, and at that point I would go and explore and find out a bunch of places, and then I would go down and check it out, a day or two before the walk and get a speaker and I used to do a lot of prep, and then by the end of the (inaudible) it was, like, I know where that is. I'll just show up there, whatever. So I did all those. We had those walks for a long time and ended up exploring a lot and finding places and (inaudible) places and also people who showed up on walks tended to -- there was the head of the local Trust for Public Land, ended up coming on a lot of walks, and I would pump him for information. So developing relationships with people who came on walks, who provided me additional information, so -- and then that led to writing the book, so then people would ask "where can I go and bike along here, where can I go and do this," and so I was sort of the person who answered a lot of those questions when people would e-mail friends of the L.A. River and stuff, and so I started to develop -- we got a little bit of money, I think it was from Fox Studios, that was going to fund creating a book of walks, and we tried to kind of self-fund it. We wrote a grant. I did a couple of sample chapters and wrote a grant. We didn't get it, and then I started working for a Councilman Reyes and I was (inaudible) river and environmental issues (inaudible), so I mean, I was doing river work but I wasn't doing it with Friends of the L.A. River anymore. I mean, I resigned from the board. I didn't want to have any conflict of interest, but I continued to work with them on their issues, but worked for the councilman. But then after I left Councilman Reyes's office -- actually, Lewis MacAdams shopped around the kind of sample stuff I had done with publishers that he was familiar with, who all said no, and then he also sent it to Wilderness Press, who ultimately published it, which does a lot of trail guides and guidebooks, and they -- it was kind of up their alley, and they do a lot of

Northern California books and they were looking to beef up some of their southern California offerings, and so they contracted for it and so that's when I really started working on it. That was November of 2004, and I was -- I committed to having it done by June 1st of 2005, and I wasn't -- I was kind of trying to make a living doing illustration, but I was pretty much living simply and not -- working off some savings, some meager savings.

COLLINGS

So you were working on the book full-time at that point.

LINTON

Yeah, pretty much from -- yeah, January through almost August, I was working. Well, actually in August I started working for Friends of the L.A. River, but yeah, January through August I worked on the book full-time.

COLLINGS

And were you doing the drawings throughout the process?

LINTON

Not -- not so much. Actually, I initially started -- I initially kind of picked sites and started roughing out chapters at home, and then I did a lot of reconnaissance, so I would go out on a bike and check out different sites and walk around and make notes of things that I wanted to draw people's attention to, and check my directions and stuff like that, and then as I -- once I had the text pretty far along, then I started to do illustrations actually out on the site, so then I would take out my pretty much finished text and my -- and go and do some drawings, and then kind of the last thing I did was do all the maps, and directions.

COLLINGS

So did you ever get a sense, as you went through your process, of how understandable the directions and the -- I mean, were you getting feedback?

LINTON

Some, yeah. I had an editor who was really good, actually, so once I had it all more or less done, then I turned it in a big chunk with all the (inaudible) and all the text to an editor, and she was really good about removing stuff that didn't need to be there, and making it -- I mean, I have tried to make it relatively jargon-free and very accessible for the public and stuff. And I think most of that was my doing, but I think the editor really helped on that, too. So...

COLLINGS

But did people, like take these walks based on the directions and were able to find everything?

LINTON

Only a couple. No. For the most part, no.

COLLINGS

Just wondering! OK, so going back to the tours that you led, and you said that the participation build up over the years. What parts of town were people coming from? Did you have a sense of who you were drawing for these events?

LINTON

Yeah. I mean, it's funny, because I would say largely, like, maybe 50 percent to two-thirds tend to be, like, seniors -- tend to be retired folks who were interested in taking a nature walk. And sometimes they would be surprised by the concrete river in downtown or something like that, but I would get them listed in, like, the L.A. Weekly and various places, and then so some just random folks, some what I call "creek freaks," like people who came consistently and stuff. But I mean, not a hundred percent, but largely it was older folks interested in taking a walk and seeing nature.

COLLINGS

So were these...

LINTON

And where they were from, too, is -- I mean, a lot of folks were -- I mean, it varied, too. I mean, there were more folks from places like Eagle Rock and the valley and stuff than there were from actual, like, most of the sort of more Latino majority neighborhoods that were actually walking, although there were -- it varied, like, doing a walk in Long Beach or doing a walk in the valley or in the Glendale Narrows would draw a different crowd. And there were some -- you know, there would be -- some people brought kids, some people -- sometimes there would be a college student working on a paper that wanted to know about the river, or there would be bicyclists. It varies a little, but the mainstay was older folks.

COLLINGS

And did they -- do you have any sense of whether some of these older folks who were the majority would then perhaps join Friends of the L.A. River or participate in any way there?

LINTON

Some. There were definitely folks who came on walks and got involved and definitely people who joined. And we used sign-in sheets to add to the Friends of the L.A. River database to outreach to people. Yeah, I mean, there would be -- yeah, it's funny because these days, I'll meet somebody and they'll say, "Oh, I came on a walk. You led me on a walk." I thought they were a couple years ago or something and it's like there's a lot of people -- I mean, it would be consistently like 30, 20 to 30 people on a typical walk and occasionally more, so I can tell you many of the people I talk to, but there were plenty of people on plenty of walks that I don't really know who they are.

COLLINGS

Just was wondering how that fed into the organization. So initially, you said Lewis MacAdams told you to go down to the river and see what it said to you, and what did it say? (laughter)

LINTON

That's a good question because I don't -- I mean, I think it -- I think it just feels like this kind of, I want to say alien place, but it's more like the city is an alien place and the river is really the place that is. But it's this place that's relaxing and that different species and that just doesn't look like the rest of L.A., and that's what L.A. looked like 200 years ago, you know, at least what parts of L.A. looked like.

COLLINGS

And the reason for the...

LINTON

I don't know. What's funny is that -- I remember, too, early on there was a guy Martin Schlager who was the executive director of Friends of the L.A. River and he saw that I biked and he said, oh, you know, I'm really looking for somebody to be the bike guy for Friends of the L.A. River. And I didn't really -- like, I identified more as an environmentalist than as a bicyclist at the time, and I felt like I didn't want to be pigeonholed as the bike guy and stuff, and I wanted to be -- I felt like that would be a peripheral role. And I am that role today, whatever. I mean, I represent that role today to a large extent, so it's funny that I -- early on, I thought that wasn't what I would do. But I don't know, I think that part of it was sort of -- it's a fun thing to just explore. I mean, I think a lot of my role was sort of, I would go out -- I was working in the hospital and I would go out on a weekend and think, hmm, I'm going to go trace the Tujunga Wash and I would go and bike along it and just kind of zigzag and cross it and check it out and try to see were there parts along it, were there places, was there enough room to put a bike path along it, and stuff like that. So I would end up sort of exploring L.A., and not long after I'd moved here, really, just sort of -- it was one thing I just would -- it's like I don't do that often enough, (inaudible), but it's like it was a handle on which I kind of cruised around the city.

COLLINGS

Did you at that time ever predict the great involvement of the city council and improving the river?

LINTON

Well, it's something we've been pushing for and that we -- I mean, it doesn't surprise me so much, but I don't know, it took a lot of pushing. But I mean, I actually -- when I started the city council, well, the county approved the master plan in 1996. And there's a lot of funky jurisdictional issues with the river that the federal and the state and the local and the county versus the city and all

kinds of private property owners versus public easements and stuff like that, so the county actually came on -- the county and the state actually came on earlier than the city and so it's good that after -- and so there were a few folks who -- in the city council where not supportive at all of the river, when I was getting involved in the mid-90's, and then term limits kicked in and there was sort of a whole new crop of council folks, a new mayor, and there was pretty broad support and the question was just, like, how much of that is lip service and how much of that is really real, and it's -- there are still advocates who feel like that plan has a lot more concrete than we'd like to see, and stuff like that, so it's still -- I mean, there's still a lot of ideas floating around like putting in inflatable dams, because we don't really have a river unless there's a whole bunch of water standing there, and I feel like, we're in a semi-arid area where our river has a lot of water in the winter and not that much water in the summer, and that's -- if we're really going to connect with our place where we live, we need to look at a river that has three or four feet of water and say that is a river, and not put a dam in, whatever, and I think the plan, the L.A. River Revitalization master plan by the city, is -- it's a big step in the right direction, has a lot of good stuff in it. It has -- especially the five nodes where they're looking at doing big interventions. Those I think are really good and really smart, at least four out of five of those are really good. But there's a lot of places where they're saying, you know, pretty much leave the channel as it is and do kind of landscaping along the top, which is what the county plan called for in '96, so it's not a bad thing if today the area's fenced off and we're going to open up the (inaudible) and make a park, but I think I want to see things go further than that plan. But I mean, I'm not against the plan. (laughter)

COLLINGS

We're now at an hour. Would you like to...

1.4. Session 4 (June 26, 2007)

COLLINGS

This is Jane Collings interviewing Joe Linton at his home on June 26th, 2007. And Joe, last time we talked about the book that you wrote as a result of your involvement with Friends of the Los Angeles River, and you talked about the -- and you said that you had done it as -- it came out of your work doing the tours, and then today we were going to talk just more generally about Friends of the Los Angeles River, and last time you had suggested that you might be interested in talking about, in the context of FoLAR, how the urban needs of a river sort of compete with more environmental concerns.

LINTON

Well there's -- I mean, somebody asked me not too long ago, what's the biggest problem -- what's the biggest obstacle to restoring the L.A. River. And I had to think about it, and I came up with, like, single-minded thinking. I think that when the river flooded in the Thirties and earlier, the engineers decided that it could only -- it was only good for one purpose, and that was flood control. And today there's still a lot of single-minded thinking, and there's still flood-control folks who say it's only good for flood control. But there are environmentalists who say we can't have anything other than habitat restoration and there are sports enthusiasts who want soccer fields and, you know, bicyclists who only want bikes, and it's really -- I think to -- I mean, we're -- it's hard to -- well, I shouldn't say it's hard to talk about restoration. It's misleading, I think, to talk about restoration in a, like, historical restoration sense. The river moved around. The river flooded. We're not going to restore the -- historically, what it did.

COLLINGS

Right, wasn't it really more of a flood plain than even an actual river in many spots?

LINTON

Yeah, it was definitely a braided channel and it had areas where it flowed one year, and then another area where it flowed the next year, so we can restore a lot of environmental function. We can have fish habitat, we can have groundwater recharge. We can have overall more habitat and more recreation and it's probably -- I like to say it's more like a garden then, like, a wholly natural thing, in that the hand of man, the hand of humankind will be there a great deal to ensure that it doesn't wander around like it did, but I think that if we are able to, as much as possible, to open up the bottom of the channel and, where possible, move the concrete out a little bit. We can have (inaudible) ecosystem at the bottom and still have a reinforced channel, so a lot of the -- you know, the city just came out with this L.A. River revitalization master plan, and it has -- many environmentalists were critical of it, in that it doesn't restore enough areas, and yet it's -- to actually just commit to doing parks along the top and bike paths and doing large-scale restoration in a number of areas, I think will be a big step in the right direction. But I mean, it is really a debate and it's a good debate, because there are -- there's a rich urban mix of uses that likely includes a lot more environmental function, but other types of parks, soccer fields, and even some housing and some compatible businesses. I don't want to see, like, Disneyland out there on the river, but I want to see, you know, cafes and kind of activity. I think if we -- it's difficult to do, like, pure nature in the middle of the city because it ends up being a place where homeless folks and gang members hang out and stuff like that, so if we try to just -- if we try to say -- if we try to have single-minded thinking toward the river and say, "All we

can do is pure restoration," we're going to end up with these areas that have very little activity, and then -- and then those may end up being security risks if we haven't solved those problems at the same time.

COLLINGS

So you have to deal with the flora and the fauna. (laughter)

LINTON

Yeah, so I think cafes, bike rental places, educational centers, stuff that actually generates more trips and more people will be very compatible. I mean, and some housing overlooking portions of it. So, but, I mean -- and there are -- well, there are environmentalists who are like, you know, don't -- who are no housing, don't do a development plan, and you know, but I think it's -- I mean, I'm glad that they're at the table and the discussion, but it's -- anybody who says you can only do X, or I'm only -- I can only tolerate X is not seeing the richness of what the river can mean to Los Angeles.

COLLINGS

So it's interesting because your environmentalism is always in the context of an urban environment. You always seem to bring that urban planning piece to your environmental focus, and that seems to be sort of ideally suited to working with a river that runs through the second largest city in the United States. Are you suggesting that these other forces are ignoring that piece?

LINTON

Well, (cough), pardon me. I think that actually when environmentalists are able to work, and this is really true about bicyclists, are able to work with a broader coalition, is when we become effective. In the struggles for Taylor Yard and the cornfields, Friends of the L.A. River was able to work with the Chinese groups and the homeowners and the public housing and to build a broad coalition that included traditional enviros and environmental justice groups, but a much broader range, and so I guess I think that the -- I tell bicyclists, like if we walk into a room, if bicyclists walk into a neighborhood council meeting and say, you know, we want you to do a bike path or bike lanes here, because bikes are so great, we're going to be in the small minority, and if we walk into a room and say, well, this happened on Silver Lake Boulevard bike lanes, the plans here show more cut-through traffic in your neighborhood, and is -- bikes are part is a solution of localizing and having walkable, friendly streets and stuff like that, then that appeals and I think -- so I think we need to -- we river environmentalists, we "creek freaks," as I like to call us, we need to -- god, I don't want to say "sell our vision." I guess sell our vision, whatever. (laughter) Like, too marketing-crass, but we need to sell our vision in the mix of something that appeals to people, and not try to -- I think we become marginalized if we just say -- if we try to insist on the purest, most natural solution, but I mean -- and I'm often in a group the one who's saying, no, we

really do need to, you know, look at the fish and restore ecological function, so I mean, I'm not opposed to that viewpoint. I just don't -- I just think it's more -- it's difficult and probably not -- probably divisive and not consensus-building to insist on that over everything.

COLLINGS

And where does this expression "creek freaks" come from?

LINTON

(laughter) Um, I think I heard it from Jessica Hall, who's this great -- she works for the Regional Water Board on the Ballona Creek restoration stuff, but she did a thesis called "Seeking Streams" that's about daylighting creeks, actually in this area. Like, Sacatella Creek is right where First Street dips, like just a couple blocks. I'm pointing out the window to a couple blocks away. So throughout L.A., there were both year-round streams and seasonal streams, and we've paved those over and some -- a movement that's occurred in many parts of the world, in Berkeley and Switzerland and Toronto, where they've actually in places, where possible in things like schoolyards and parking lots and parks, been able to open up those creeks and let them flow again on the surface, so...

COLLINGS

So is this an expression that she coined?

LINTON

I'm not sure.

COLLINGS

Just because I've heard you use it several times.

LINTON

Yeah, I like it. (laughter)

COLLINGS

And it's over the last couple -- and I was just wondering what it really meant to you, with the -- who is a "creek freak?"

LINTON

I mean -- there's a bunch -- part of it is, I mean, there are a bunch of river activists. I actually like "creek freak" because it rhymes, of course, and then in some ways, when I first got involved, really The River was it and there wasn't a lot of attention to the tributaries, and the more I study, the more I become aware, the whole system is entirely interconnected and if we're going to restore the L.A. River we need to be looking at the tributaries. We need to be looking at the neighborhoods. We need to be looking at the entire watershed, and so the way the system's built is to flush the water as fast as possible, and so if we -- if we start to look at the main stem of the L.A. River and say where can we restore here, it's actually more difficult to restore there than it is to restore areas further up the watershed where we have less water focused already by the collection system. So, if we're looking at the most naturally authentic projects,

we probably need to look at the smaller creeks first, and build our way down. And it's all interconnected, but I think that there's been somewhat of an unwarranted emphasis on the main stem of the river itself.

COLLINGS

What is your favorite part of the river? I mean, you've written this wonderful book and it describes so many walks and so many of the spots, and I was just wondering what...

LINTON

There's a part -- it's actually the end of Meadowvale Street in Elysian Valley. It's actually -- it's where I take people who have never seen the river, or whatever, when I would get a call from a reporter or a college student or somebody requesting to interview me or to see the river, that's where I send them. It's an area, it's part of the Glendale Narrows, where the water comes up from underground, so they didn't pave the bottom, and there's a little street end, minipark built by North East Trees that has sycamore and an oak tree and California sunflower and it has sort of a retaining wall built out of broken concrete and river rock and they've built this playful little, like a throne into the retaining wall, where you can sit down and there's a bench by an artist Brett Goldstone but really the river there -- the river meanders around between two concrete slopes, so it's a trapezoidal channel with a soft bottom, and that area -- so, and it changes from year to year, gradually, but that area -- so many of the areas, many parts of the Glendale Narrows from the Elysian Valley side, which is really where more people live, in the southern part of the Glendale Narrows, anyways, as opposed to Taylor Yard which is a railroad yard on the far side. Many parts of the river, the water is running sort of behind some willow trees and stuff, so it's harder to see the water, but the river has a nice bend that it runs right near this little park and there's always ducks and usually herons and egrets and so it's a nice -- there's plenty of rocks and it has a good sound and it's in a neighborhood not too close to the -- a lot of the Glendale Narrows runs along the 5 Freeway so it sort of -- you get a lot of freeway noise, but in Elysian Valley, especially the southern part of it, it's very nice.

COLLINGS

The willow trees always lend a nice character to any setting. I noticed that one of the first big public events of Friends of the L.A. River was the clean-up, and it's in Spanish. How do you pronounce the...

LINTON

La Gran Limpieza.

COLLINGS

Yeah, and why was it publicized with a Spanish title?

LINTON

Well, it's funny, because we translated it. Early on, we translated it into Chinese and Spanish, and we actually got the Spanish wrong. We said "La Gran Limpiada," which is what you might think it would be, but it's slightly irregular. So it's limpieza and not limpiada. So we have a T-shirt that says "limpiada." I forget who pointed that out. It was like right as I was coming on, so -- I mean, really the river runs through a lot of that communities -- I mean, like all of Los Angeles that are largely Latino and we felt like we wanted to -- I mean, there has been somewhat of a tension between -- Friends of the L.A. River is more -- is whiter than the neighborhoods that it represents, and generally the environmental movement is whiter than the emerging populations in southern California, so we definitely have reached out to -- work with Spanish speaking groups but also with Chinese and Korean speakers, so I mean, yeah, if we want to reach people who live along the river, we need to speak the language that they do.

COLLINGS

So how successful were you in those campaigns, in bringing in Korean speakers and Spanish speakers for the clean-up?

LINTON

So actually, for Korean we partner with a group called PAVA, the Pacific-American Volunteer Association that's largely Korean but actually they brought in Taiwanese and other groups, but I mean, I think our biggest successes have been when we've worked with organized groups as opposed to just broadly reaching out. I mean, Spanish speakers, we've involved a lot -- in the fight for the Taylor Yard, the railroad yard in Cypress Park that's now a 40-acre river park and hopefully about a 100-acre river park on the way, we work closely with a group called the Anahuak Youth Soccer Organization, and the -- actually, they're called the Anahuak Youth Sports Association, but they're largely soccer. But they -- the head of that is a gentleman named Raul Macias who's primarily Spanish-speaking and all the youth are Latino and so in -- so it's worked best in building coalitions and doing outreach to actually, you know, connect with existing efforts like that, like Anahuak and like PAVA.

COLLINGS

Because you already have the trust of the community through this one person.

LINTON

Yeah, exactly.

COLLINGS

And so one of the things that we were talking about was how do or don't organizations structure themselves to sustain themselves beyond the tenure of their charismatic founder? And how do you see Friends of the L.A. River in that light?

LINTON

Yeah, I mean, Lewis MacAdams is the founder, who's a poet, who I've already talked about. I think it has been difficult for people to -- I mean, Lewis remains 21, 22 years after founding, remains chairman of the board and very involved on a day-to-day basis with our organization and I think that it's both his strengths and his weaknesses that play out in the way the organization works. And I think overall his impulses are really good. His things like fighting for the cornfields, we all thought it was -- we were all skeptical that it was a winnable battle, and then it turned out it was. And had we been highly rational and strategic about it, we may not have taken that on. But I mean, I think it's also been difficult -- Lewis is, like, creative and visionary and good at opening cans of worms and better at opening cans of worms than he is at really finishing projects and something like that, so it's sometime difficult to -- well, it's been difficult I think for leadership on the board of directors to step up, because in the end it's sort of like what Lewis says goes, so I know...

COLLINGS

Is it because it's structured that way, or because he has sort of a personality that creates that kind of situation?

LINTON

Yeah, 'cause it's not -- formally it's not structured that way, but informally that's how it works, so yeah, I think it has more to do with his personality and the way he gets things done. I mean, there's an instance of the board -- this is actually when I was not on the board, that I was told about this, but the board deciding something and then Lewis coming into the office the next day and telling the staff, oh, I don't think you should work on that. So there's occasionally even very direct undermining of board decisions.

COLLINGS

Now, why do you believe that the cornfields was an unwinnable battle? What led you to think that?

LINTON

Well, there was -- I mean, there were -- Mayor Riordan was behind industrial development at the cornfields and had secured -- I think it was 14 million dollars in HUD funding for like a $30 to 40 million project, so it just had a lot of money and Ed Roski, the developer of the Staples Center was behind developing it, so it seemed like -- it seemed like a pretty difficult sell, to stop the project that seemed to have a lot of momentum for the site.

COLLINGS

Now, you've also worked with the Bus Riders' Union. Would you like to say a little bit about that?

LINTON

So, a lot of what I've done -- I mean, actually, I used to go out and volunteer for Bus Riders' Union in, like, '99 and 2000, and then more recently I've generally

just done artwork for them, for their flyers and stuff. I mean, Bus Riders' Union is a very radical, very confrontational group that sued the MTA and won, and has brought hundreds of millions of dollars into investment in the bus system that was being systematically neglected.

COLLINGS

Didn't they play a large role in getting the buses switched over to natural gas?

LINTON

Yeah, the -- well, the MTA made a decision in like '94, '95 to go to CNG buses, natural gas buses, and the bus riders sued and forced the MTA to buy more buses. When they were about to buy more buses, there was a big push by the board to say, "If we have to buy all these buses, let's get the diesel ones, because they're cheaper," and the Bus Riders' Union argued that in the lawsuit negotiations, when you agreed to buy the buses, you were under a natural gas policy and therefore you should keep that, and so the MTA had committed to natural gas buses prior to the Bus Riders' Union, but was reneging on it and the Bus Riders' Union held them to it. But I mean, the bus system largely -- as L.A. began to build rails in the contemporary iteration of rail, according to this guy John Walsh, who's sort of a gadfly who knows everything about the MTA, the actual seated capacity of the overall transportation system from the late 80's into the mid-90's declined by nearly 20 percent. Bus service was being cut, buses were running down and degrading and a tiny bit of rail was being added to the system but it was really massive overcrowding and so I think the Bus Riders' Union played a critical role in not allowing that to sort of crumble.

COLLINGS

Pointing out that so much money was being put into the development of these rail systems that were serving middle and upper-middle class populations.

LINTON

Yeah, white folks. (laughter) Yeah, no, absolutely. They sued on civil rights law that said separate but unequal isn't allowed, and were able to -- actually, it's interesting. I've learned -- I worked for a gentleman named Robert Garcia who's a civil rights lawyer who is part of the lawsuit, who now does work around access to parks and beaches largely for communities of color, but he was saying that one of the most convincing arguments in the MTA lawsuit was that the city of Manhattan Beach had -- there was direct service from South Central Los Angeles to the beach, and the city of Manhattan Beach had requested that the MTA cut that service and not bring black people to the beach, basically, and the MTA did it. So the decisions of -- you know, I think sadly, the decisions of the MTA are not based on what's an effective transportation system for southern California that will get people out of their cars, but sort of -- it's often, I mean, I think there are racial motivations, but I think money plays a huger role in it, that all the big construction firms that want to build huge capital projects are

pushing for these massive capital projects, subways, and other rail, and not -- and there's not sufficient wisdom on the board and stuff like that to resist these pressures to actually build systems that provide the transportation needs for folks here.

COLLINGS

It would certainly seem so. (laughter) Let's talk a little bit about your work with Livable Places now, if you want to describe what the organization does and what your role is.

LINTON

So, Livable Places is a recently -- somewhat new group started in, like, 2001. We build affordable housing and we also advocate for policies for livable neighborhoods. We push for, like, walkable, bikeable transit-oriented development. It's called "smart growth," although that term's somewhat overused anyways, but I mean that's something people have heard of. We just opened a project in Long Beach along the Metro Blue Line where people can walk a couple blocks and hop on a train, and we're building another one in Lincoln Heights.

COLLINGS

And how does the Olive Grove, is it? In Olive...

LINTON

Yeah, Olive Court.

COLLINGS

How does that work in terms of mixed income?

LINTON

So what it is, is it has -- there are subsidies for first-time homebuyers, largely, so there are -- and there are market-rate units for sale just like any other condominium/. And I'm actually on the policy side of the organization and I don't know as much about -- I mean, I'm whatever, I'm curious in learning somewhat about what we call -- there's a real-estate side and a policy side, so the real-estate side builds and designs and builds and sells housing and then the policy side is somewhat like watchdogging city policies and state policies and stuff to ensure liveability -- which is a vague term, but to look at increased affordable housing in standards for building close to transit, street standards. A lot of sort of watchdogging of the city planning department, and sort of the stuff that they're coming up with, the housing element and the transportation element which is now called the mobility element, and the community plans, and sort of involving people who live in these areas to -- largely who live in the core parts of Los Angeles to be involved and steer these kind of processes.

COLLINGS

And how successful has that been?

LINTON

Well, I think that organization's pretty young and we're not -- and I've only been there since May 1st, and it's the end up June or whatever, so I'm still less than two months, but the -- like, building affordable housing is really tough in L.A., and if it were easy we probably wouldn't have a huge shortage of affordable housing here, so a lot of our planning codes and other subsidies and regulations tend to favor for-profit development and it's -- and market-rate housing and so L.A.'s long been -- you know, developments kind of mean, I guess Hollywood's a bit institute but development's really a lot of the money that drives politics and stuff like that, so there's a lot of instances of relatively good plans that haven't been enforced or a developer is getting what they want and not necessarily what the community's asking for, and stuff like that, so as far as our effectiveness, I think it's -- I think they're -- they have -- I mean, there are community development corporations in L.A. like ELACC, the East Los Angeles Community Corporation, that build affordable housing. There are certainly bike groups, and some pedestrian groups and some transit groups, but there haven't been -- I think (inaudible) fills a good niche for looking at -- I mean, looking at how we build L.A. and not -- and making it not car-centric and making -- you know, how do we -- it actually mixes a lot of issues that are important and it's therefore sometimes hard for me to describe what we do, but things like fighting gentrification on, like, a broader policy basis. There are definitely groups in neighborhoods that have an anti-gentrification agenda, but it tends to be more "we're in MacArthur Park and we're worried about gentrification." "We're in Echo Park, worried about gentrification here," so I think Livable Places sort of looks at how can we build a walkable, liveable city with a mix of parks and transit and housing and commercial jobs and -- in a way that's, you know, out of the mainstream with the direction that L.A. goes. L.A.'s very car-based and very market-based and we're sort of saying how can we do that in a way that's community-driven and environmentally friendly and about the people who actually already live here. So...

COLLINGS

Is there -- I mean, one of the things that one tends to find in a less decentralized, more community-oriented neighborhood is, you know, some sort of cultural cohesion. I mean, how does Livable Places look at the ethnic diversity of Los Angeles?

LINTON

I mean, it's -- it's a good question, and we're definitely -- we definitely do a lot of work with what we call, like base-building groups. There's ELACC, who I mentioned. There's a group called SAJE, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy, and in the kind of Westlake/MacArthur Park area there's Central City Neighborhood Partners and Collective Space. We tend to actually -- we tend to be a little more, like, wonky than the base-building groups, and so we don't -- I

mean, we definitely want to reach out and serve those populations, but we tend to be, I think, like a little bit above the fray in that we're sort of planning and -- I mean, I'd probably get in trouble for saying that in front of my boss, but it's like, we don't have -- I mean, a lot of those groups have, like, leadership training for the folks that they're organizing within the neighborhood. We may do that ultimately, but I mean, we're -- we're more prone to -- I mean, work with those groups, like there's a series of community plan updates that the city's doing and we're very interesting in making those progressive and including things like affordable housing and transferring development within those community plan updates. But we're also working with those groups that are really based in those areas to say, hey, there's this update. How do we approach this together, and what direction should we be going with it? And it's not -- whatever. We're definitely reaching -- we're definitely attempting to serve and better the lives of low-income communities of color in Los Angeles. And I think we'd do it -- we'd do it working through other groups more than working directly with those constituents. But I think too, one of the -- like, you talked about, like, culture and -- a lot of those communities, in fact this neighborhood falls into that -- a lot of these communities, people who are kind of climbing their way up the American Dream, see -- and I should put that in, like, quotes. (laughter) Because it's sort of the lie, but I mean, a lot of people -- a lot of recent immigrants -- but even, like, 20-year-old, people who have been here for 20 years, when I say recent immigrants, first-generation immigrants perhaps -- live in these neighborhoods and live here for a long time, but never see this as where they're settling in, but see it as a waystation on their way to bigger and better, and so I think part of what we want to do is work to make these neighborhoods places that people feel like this is my neighborhood and this is where I want to stay and I'm active in changing my neighborhood for the better and I'm not going away, and that's tricky because a lot of the folks who live in lower-income neighborhoods are not very empowered about making change in their neighborhood, and part of it is they're busy working two jobs or something too, and raising kids and stuff, so...

COLLINGS

Yeah, so it's a real challenge for the city of Los Angeles, because such a large number of people can and do face that situation.

LINTON

Yeah, the city of L.A. has -- it's more than 60 percent. I think it's almost 70 percent renters, people -- you know, and a lot of like, when the city, you know, does notification on a policy that goes to homeowners or whatever and stuff, so it's -- I think we need to acknowledge that renters stick around for a long time, and are part of their neighborhood and should have a say and should be engaged and there's -- I mean, there's folks -- I mean, my next-door neighbor

who's an immigrant from Mexico, she's lived in this neighborhood for 20 years, you know. So, and in the next building there's a gentleman who's been here for like 45, renting, so renters are in many cases not as volatile as city policy would think that they are.

COLLINGS

Right. What do you think about the revitalization of downtown? What's your opinion?

LINTON

Well, overall, I think it's great. I think that we need to -- I mean, with the L.A. River, and stuff like that, we need to sort of recenter. We need to say we're not going to sprawl out into the foothills and the hinterlands and drive forever, so I think that having a downtown that is a center of activity -- I mean, frankly, downtown has been before white people discovered downtown, Latinos were shopping there and North Broadway and streets downtown, Main and...

COLLINGS

It was always very vital to that (inaudible).

LINTON

Had plenty of people and lots of shopping, and I think the trick with downtown is -- I mean, something -- my boss, Beth Steckler, (inaudible) is quick to point out, is that the housing that's been generated downtown is almost entirely market-rate, and that I think we do need more mixed-income, more affordable housing downtown if we're going to create an non-homogenous mix, whatever. I think that there's -- what's tricky downtown is that there's sort of an oil and water scenario that there are a lot of establishments that serve Latinos, that take the bus downtown and go to Broadway or whatever, and then there's sort of the new yuppie-ish downtown emerging, and I think that as we're building parks on the river downtown, as we're creating public space downtown -- where that is, it's hard to say. Parks, hopefully. I think we need to really look at how we do things that serve all those populations and not to continue to segregate them.

COLLINGS

Yeah, a lot of the housing thing seems to be pitched towards single, which...

LINTON

Yeah, empty nesters, they say. (inaudible) There's not a lot of kids downtown yet.

COLLINGS

Or white kids, particularly.

LINTON

Yeah, that's true.

COLLINGS

What is your opinion of the star power in the environmental movement? Daryl Hannah at the farm, Lori Davids...

LINTON

Ed Begley, Jr.

COLLINGS

Right, exactly.

LINTON

I think it's a problem. I mean, I think it's -- I mean, I had somebody, I think it was in this documentary Eyes on the Prize talking about the civil rights movement and how the media wants to pick the charismatic leader who does everything and really, the civil rights movement was about hundreds of thousands of people taking a stand, and when it boils down to Martin Luther King, Jr., that's an issue, and I think that there was a documentary -- I forget what it was called -- like, about the environmental movement in Los Angeles. It was on PBS. Something green. Anyways. (laughter) Sorry to go on. I guess that's good. And it was all about, like, Ed Begley is saving the world and Lewis MacAdams and Melanie Winter are saving the river, and Darryl Clarke is saving the Expo Line or whatever, and it was like...

COLLINGS

Was that on fairly recently in January or February and featured a piece on TreePeople as well?

LINTON

Andy Lipkis, yeah. And I think it's -- I don't know. I guess people should be inspired by individual heroes or whatever, but I mean, I don't know. I feel like it's very -- it's frustrating to me, actually, frankly when -- I mean, there was a New Yorker article recently too, where it was maybe 2004, where it was this huge profile of Lewis MacAdams and how the river movement was Lewis MacAdams and I felt like that may have been the case in '91 or something, but I mean, in 2004 it's misleading to say that there's only -- there's basically one person out there saving the river, and I mean, and Lewis is great and has done a lot, but I mean, I think it's -- I don't know, I think it does a disservice to the collective nature of struggle to say that, you know, "single-handedly Lewis MacAdams is bringing back the L.A. River." It's like, no, it's not true. So, and I mean, I don't know. Clearly, media has to simplify messages and stuff, but it frustrates me -- people meet me or see me and say, "Oh, you're the river guy?" And I'm like, no, I'm "a river guy." And it's like -- I just don't like -- I don't know. It should never boil down to -- and it never does boil down to, like, one person doing it. It should always be a broader collective community effort, so I think the celebrity thing doesn't serve that. Actually, it's been a big issue with -- the Bike Kitchen is this collective bike shop that started here at Eco-Village and now has its own storefront, and they have a staff of 35 -- they call them cooks, whatever, like bike mechanics who teach people how to fix their bike, all of whom do at least four hours a week volunteering many -- two shifts. And

they have this very collective sense and it's exasperating for them when the media go in there. They want to say, "Jimmy Lizama is bringing bike culture to Los Angeles" or whatever, and it's like, the media really wants to pick out the personality, whatever, and when you're involved in a collective enterprise it's disheartening when you see a newsmedia article that's picked someone -- even when it's picked you -- and said "This is the whole thing," and it's like, no, that's not the whole thing.

COLLINGS

But do you think that these bike profile people such as Lori David or Daryl Hannah bring publicity to the movement?

LINTON

I guess. I'd rather Daryl Hannah was out doing good thing than out doing bad things, but I mean, I'm not -- it's not -- I don't know, it's funny 'cause I know a bunch of people who work in the film industry and (inaudible) and it's a huge -- I had a date on Saturday night and the woman I was with said, "That guy is Jason Lee," is who he was, but it was like -- and I was like, I didn't -- I mean, I don't have a TV. I don't track that stuff, whatever. It's not -- my heroes are like Lewis MacAdams and David Nahai and Mary Nichols, you know, people who have done good things for a long time for the environment. Dorothy Green. So that's who I would want to notice and say, "Hey, that's Dorothy Green," but it's like, I don't know -- I just don't -- I guess, I mean, frankly I didn't recognize that person Jason Lee at all, and she's like, oh, no, he's been in a bunch of movies. But who's that Lori David, who's that?

COLLINGS

Well, she's the wife of -- now his name escapes me, but blank David -- Larry David, who is a huge producer. He was the producer of the Seinfeld show, and she's really taken the lead.

LINTON

Does she have -- did she direct or do something on An Inconvenient Truth?

COLLINGS

I wouldn't be at all surprised if she had been involved with that. Sorry, I don't remember what her exact credit would have been, but yeah.

LINTON

I mean, I think it's good. I mean, I think that (laughter) (inaudible) back to comic books as a kid, like Spider-man said, "With great power comes great responsibility." I think if you're a media superstar, you have a lot of people following what you're doing and you should use that power to make things better, but I mean, as far as what -- you know, it's like when we started the Bike Coalition, the State of California group, the California Bike Coalition, there was a guy Chris Morfas, who kept saying "You guys are L.A. You need to get celebrities up on bicycles. That's your role." And I was just like, "I live in

Koreatown. There's no celebrities who live here." Or maybe there are, but I mean, there's not -- L.A. is -- even the landscape, the world I live in, the buses I ride on, aren't populated by movie stars. They're populated by real working-class people that are living day-to-day and it's not, whatever. It doesn't...

COLLINGS

So your pragmatic view would not lend yourself to go in that direction?

LINTON

Yeah, although I'm not opposed to whatever. If Daryl Hannah shows up at Livable Places and says I want to help you sell your affordable condos, I'm not going to say no. But I mean -- but at the same time, I'm not going to seek that out as solution.

COLLINGS

Now, speaking of bicycles, I notice in Los Angeles two entirely separate groups on bicycles. I notice people in biking outfits...

LINTON

Like lycra?

COLLINGS

Yeah, and I notice people who seem to be heading off to work, no helmet, rickety old bike.

LINTON

Yeah. No, I...

COLLINGS

Which of these populations does the Bicycle Kitchen serve? Or do they serve a different group?

LINTON

Definitely the Bicycle Kitchen is the working bicyclist and not the lycra bicyclist. I mean, I think it's -- I think we need to be careful not to -- I mean, I think that bicyclists are people who -- bicycling mode share for transportation, for commutes is about one percent in L.A. County, and so for bicyclists we need to be really careful not to say, "Oh, I don't belong -- they're not part of my club because they wear lycra and I don't," or whatever. I mean, I think we can all work together and push to make things safer for bicyclists and that we'll all benefit. But I mean, having said that, I'm very much on the side of people who -- I rarely bike just for the joy of bicycling or the exercise. I bike to get somewhere and I enjoy it and I get good exercise out of that. But I mean, it's just when I go to work and when I go to the gym, and when I go wherever I do it on a bicycle, so when I go to the store, so I definitely identify with the second group that you're describing, but I think that -- you know, all of us should be looking at, whatever. I would want to appeal to people who see themselves as bicycling only on the weekend for exercise, that when they have -- when they're going to return that video, five blocks away, you know, they should be

able to do it on a bike. I mean, and they may not be car-free tomorrow, but I mean, a friend of mine, Chuck, he looked at -- he had two kids and his wife didn't really want to bike super-far, and he was on the board of the Bike Coalition and they took a map at their house and drew a two-mile radius around their house and said, "Any errand we run that's within this two-mile radius, we're going to do it on bikes," and so I think that those recreational lycra bicyclists can -- I want them to be aware that they can be, whatever. I want them to be more aware of their bicycle as a transportation tool. So...

COLLINGS

OK, well, just in sort of wrapping up here, you know, you're mentioned people that you admire, Mary Nichols and Dorothy Green and Lewis MacAdams and -- I mean, who have your mentors been along this road so far?

LINTON

I think -- Lewis MacAdams is a big one, and I think part of what he showed me is sort of environmentalism can be about creativity and vision and not about sort of plodding and sacrificing.

COLLINGS

That's very interesting.

LINTON

So I think -- there was -- I don't know if I talked about it. Did I talk about the Memet Sander dance company? There was a dance company that I worked with when I was in Long Beach, and this guy Memet Sander was this very out, very queer, almost crazy in many ways, but a person who creatively had just had this really clear, like, artistic voice and had -- from, like, the way the curtain opened to the way the bows were taken to what the program looked like, nothing was conventional. He wanted it to be like his vision and Lewis had some of that too. I mean, there was a board meeting when we were talking about the L.A. River clean-up and we were broke and we were looking at how to trim back on costs and each year we have musicians. We have bands play at clean-up sites and the board was like, let's cut the bands and save money, and Lewis was like, no, the clean-up -- we want people to have -- we want it to feel festive. We want people to go down to the river and have a party and enjoy it and the bands are important to that and stuff, so I think both Memet and Lewis sort of said we can pursue these artistic, environmental -- Memet wasn't environmental, but artistic endeavors in a way that's uniquely our vision and that attention to detail and joy in detail are huge parts of that, and I think that's something I believe in strongly, like my book, that the drawings say somebody cares about this and somebody enjoys this, more than just communicating, "OK, turn right here."

COLLINGS

So that -- I mean, that, I would think would be one thing that would keep you going, that each of these actions is in a certain way a work.

LINTON

Yeah. I would say too, it's building a culture, too. So...

COLLINGS

What kind of music were the bands playing?

LINTON

Oh, all kinds of stuff like there are steel drum bands, there was a brass band. There was kind of just a blues guitarist. There's a really good reggae hip-hop DJ turntable group, and there's all kinds. It's just like -- and it was like, a lot of it was local. OK, this is the Long Beach band, and this is the Frogtown band, and stuff like that. So it's not -- we tried to get stuff that would carry, 'cause it's a big outdoor event, but it's -- lots of different kinds of stuff.

COLLINGS

OK, I think we're just about done here. Anything you'd like to add?

LINTON

No, I think that's all. It feels awkward, like I've -- I'm 43 and I -- I'm looking up -- I've got some, like the Bike Coalition gave me an award, and the Occidental College, the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute gave me an award and I'm being interviewed and stuff. It's like, I think the...

COLLINGS

The best is yet to come.

LINTON

Yeah, the best is yet to come, exactly.

COLLINGS

I'll have to catch you back up in 20, 30 years.

LINTON

I think there's plenty to do still, so...
