

A TEI Project

Interview of Lewis MacAdams

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (August 17, 2007)

Collings

Okay, Jane Collings interviewing Lewis MacAdams at his home, August 17th, 2007. Good morning, Lewis.

MacAdams

Good morning.

Collings

Let's just start off with where and when you were born.

MacAdams

I was born in a small town in West Texas called San Angelo, October twelfth, 1944. My dad was stationed there in the air force during World War II.

Collings

Okay. I was wondering, because I saw that you were born in West Texas, and I was just wondering how that came about.

MacAdams

Yes. My dad left, was transferred to Lincoln, Nebraska, so I don't remember very much about--I don't remember anything about San Angelo, actually. I've only been there once in my life, I can't remember how many years ago, but it's a long way from anywhere. It's a very isolated place, the mohair capital of the world. There's a big sheep-raising--

Collings

The mohair capital?

MacAdams

Yes, that's what somebody told me anyway.

Collings

So you're not actually Texan?

MacAdams

Oh no. I grew up in Texas. I grew up in Dallas.

Collings

Oh, you did?

MacAdams

Yes. My mom is from Dallas. She was born in Dallas, and my dad met her during the war. He was from St. Louis, and he moved to Dallas after the war, after they got married, so I lived in Dallas my entire life until I went away to college.

Collings

Okay, yes, and I can hear a little bit of that.

MacAdams

Yes, you know, I tried really hard to get rid of my Texas accent, because partly out of just contrariness, and partly, you know, I grew up during segregation times, and I hated white people, and I didn't want to be identified with what I thought people thought of as being from Texas. Also, I did a lot of radio stuff when I was in college, you know, so there was all that stuff was going on.

Collings

So you needed to have that standard broadcast thing.

MacAdams

Right, right, or I thought I did anyway.

Collings

So what kinds of things did your father do when he wasn't in the service?

MacAdams

He was essentially a salesman. He went into business with my mother's father, who was a chemist who had been a professor at Ohio State [University], and he came to Dallas to run the Dallas Water Department, and was fired by-- because of the influence, at least so the family story goes, the influence of the Ku Klux Klan, which was very powerful in Dallas and in Texas in those days. He was Jewish, so having a Jew running the water supply was, I guess, too much for some people to bear. So he went into business, and I don't think he was ever really meant to be a businessman, from what I remember of him as a child. He seemed much more professorial, and my dad was just a natural salesman, so he went to work with him and took over the business, and they eventually--he did a lot of different kinds of products. He was in the food industry, mostly in the baking industry, and a lot of things that make white bread what it is were products, like mold inhibitors and yeast foods and stuff like that, that, you know, when white bread was all the bread there was, you know. So he did very well doing that for a long time, and then he sold out his business, and then he tried to invest in a lot of areas he didn't know anything about, and he lost

everything that he'd done. He was the kind of guy who knew the right restaurant to go to in every city in the Western world, and he dressed great, and really he wasn't, had very little education, really. I mean, I don't think he ever went to college, but he understood how to talk the talk anyway, so.

Collings

And where did he grow up?

MacAdams

He grew up in St. Louis, but he didn't really grow up so much--his mom, my grandmother on my dad's side was an actress, and a very unsuccessful one. She was in some of Thomas Edison's first talking movies, but that was a period where to be an actress in movies was about one step above being a hooker, you know. It was just, she is a theater person. And then she ran off with a guy, and I don't know anything about him much, but except my dad's older sister is still alive. She's in her late nineties, and I've talked to her about him. But they went gold mining in Northern California, and they tried a bunch of different ventures, and it didn't work out, and so my grandmother came back to St. Louis and lived with her relatives. So my dad never knew his dad, and never really had a home, and it had a lot to do with his life, I think, and probably a lot to do with mine, too, actually.

Collings

So your grandmother actually [unclear]?

MacAdams

Yes.

Collings

I never heard of a female gold miner.

MacAdams

You know, this is all in the realm of legend, so I mean, I think my dad's sister, I don't think she was really exaggerating. They may have had a gold mine and he did the actual mining, or you know, god knows what the real story is, but that's how the story always comes down.

Collings

That's very interesting.

MacAdams

Yes, you know. And he I guess was--I mean, I guess they were in a way, I mean at least the way I've always imagined them, as being really bohemian, you know. My dad had a little of that, I guess, when he was a young man before he left, before the war in St. Louis, and I think there were some family in Kansas City, so they were both cities that I sort of think of as being my dad's world. He hung around Thomas Hart Benton a little bit, you know the painter, and his sister was in Paris and was like a young lesbian on the Gertrude Stein-Alice B. Toklas scene a little bit, you know, and then she ran out of money and

had to come home. But I mean, so there is something of that that they inherited from their mom.

Collings

The family was interested in the arts.

MacAdams

Yes. You know, yes. I mean, I don't really think of my parents at all as being--I mean my dad certainly had very little formal education. My mom, I don't know if she ever graduated from college or not, but you know, being intelligent, and compared to the people I grew up around, I mean there were some books in the house, and my parents, my father especially loved opera, so there was something, you know, some of that. But when it began to activate in my life, it was not something that they were very comfortable with, to put it mildly.

Collings

They didn't think it would support you.

MacAdams

No, and they were, of course, completely right, you know, but I didn't understand that at the time.

Collings

Were your grandparents born in the United States?

MacAdams

Yes. My grandparents--let me think about this factor. Yes, my mother's side, both parents were born in the United States. My dad's side, yes, both sides born in the United States, but I think the generation before--well, it depends, because my dad's side was kind of fractured. I know that my mom's parents were both from Ohio, and my mom's mother came from a big family and they were in the fashion business, so I would assume they were probably first generation, but I don't really know. They might have been second generation. They weren't too far from the shtetl. I don't know them very well. You know, I didn't know them very well when they were alive, and after my mom died I really kind of lost that connection. But I remember them as being extremely prosperous Republicans, and big sports fans and supporters of the University of Cincinnati. And my dad's side, on his father's side were WASPs going all the way back to the first families of Virginia. I mean, they were like, you know, Thomas Jefferson's wife's--my father was always talking about, and he had, I think my brother has it now, Civil War discharge papers from--so, you know, so that side, on the father's father's family, American for a long time, and on the father's mother's side, probably--I know she was born in the States, but I don't know if her parents were or not.

Collings

So where did your parents meet, how did they meet? Because they sound like they were from dissimilar backgrounds?

MacAdams

Yes. They met in Dallas at a hotel called the Baker Hotel, I believe, at sort of a supper club. My mom had been married once before. She had married a guy that she'd grown up knowing, and it had been annulled. I don't really know how long after that she met my dad, but I know that it was during the war. What my mom was doing I don't really know. I don't know if she had a job or not, or why she happened to be at the Baker Hotel. It was kind of--just because I want to be accurate about this, there were two hotels in Downtown L.A. that were semi-fancy, the Baker and the Adolphus [Hotel in Dallas], and I'm not sure which --

Collings

In Downtown L.A.?

MacAdams

Downtown Dallas, I'm sorry. And they both sort of had supper clubs, and I'm not sure whether it was the Baker or the Adolphus where they met, but it was a supper club and they were both with other people, and somehow they met that night. You know, my mom and dad were married for a long time, and I thought that, from what I could always tell they had quite a good marriage until later in life, when my dad really, you know, he blew it in a lot of ways, and you can sort of see, he didn't really know who he was, and he never--he wasn't raised, in a way, and it caused a lot of problems later in their marriage, and certainly financial problems.

I mean my dad, when he sold his company, they had money to live on and to live well. But my dad's attitude was to try and parlay it into being really, really rich, and he got involved in things he didn't know anything about, and he lost everything.

Collings

So did you have brothers or sisters?

MacAdams

Yes. I have two brothers and a sister, all younger than me. I have a brother who I was just in Italy with, who's actually inherited a lot of my dad's sales abilities, and he's actually going through some serious, I mean he's a money manager. We went to a prep school in Dallas called St. Mark's [School], which was the school at that time, I think still is. So Mike has always been a salesman. He lived in Europe for a number of years, selling for American companies, and he's married a very sensible woman. This is his third marriage, and she's helped him a lot to just being able to turn what he does into something, into gold. Right now he's a money manager, and the stock market crashing is causing him a lot of fear and a lot of worry right now, because he's got a lot of people's money invested.

Collings

Right, right. The shock heard round the world.

MacAdams

Yes, you know, and when we were in Italy, I mean every day we were reading the International Herald Tribune, and it's like, oh no, you know, it's like and people are starting to call, like wondering what's going on with their investments. So anyway, so that's what he does. And my sister is a social worker in Dallas. She's had a life I wouldn't have expected. She was--Hockaday is the sort of girl's equivalent of St. Mark's, and she was the president of her class at Hockaday, and when she was in college she met this guy, John Howard, who wanted to be a biologist. They both graduated from University of Miami, and he never fulfilled anything that he wanted to do. For many years he's been basically an air-conditioning salesman, and they live in sort of in Plano, which is a northern suburb of Dallas, and never go anywhere. She's afraid to fly. But she's a great mom, and she's a great social worker, and you know, I mean she's been married for thirty-odd years and they have almost-grown children, a couple of grown children, and you know, has lived a very proscribed life in a way that I would never have thought she would. Her husband is like just a caricature of the angry white man from the suburbs, I mean, a racist, just a repulsive guy in a lot of ways. He has a good heart and I actually like him, but I don't ever talk to him. And then I have a younger brother who's ten years younger than me, who I don't know as well. I was already, you know, gone to college by the time he was eight. He's a computer consultant in Houston, and a very confusing person to me. He's very--he's the kind of person who's always late, always forgetting everything, and always hassled and hurried. He's been married a bunch of times. He didn't get--I felt that me, my next brother, and my sister were all really well raised, but my parents had a lot of money by that time, and he was, whether he was on purpose or not I don't know, but he never quite got really raised the way the rest of us did, and he seems to me, he's always seemed really unable to sort of understand other people's feelings or thoughts. He doesn't mean to be, but he's very compulsive, very impulsive and a compulsive person. He's a compulsive punster.

Collings

He's a compulsive punster?

MacAdams

Yes, yes. So I don't see much of him, and I don't really see--I mean, I love my family, but they're all in Texas, and you know, this spending a week in Naples with my brother and his wife and family was really a lot. That's a lot of time, more time than I've spent with my brother.

Collings

What does your youngest brother do for a living?

MacAdams

He's in the computer world. He's a consultant, yes. He works for a lot of law firms in Houston, making sure their systems work.

Collings

So in terms of the kinds of things that you and your brothers and sister are doing, they're all quite different, aren't they?

MacAdams

Yes. You know, I mean, I don't know how I got to be so different than them, and they're all close. I mean, everybody in our--it's a reasonably close family I would say, except maybe for me and my youngest brother, because we were so much difference in age. But you know, I mean, they have arguments. My brother and my sister argue all the time, but they're still very close. I mean, my brother is really one of these people, he's a permanent AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] guy, and he's convinced that my father was an alcoholic, and you know, I think by the standards of our time he would be considered that, but by the standards of his time I don't think--I mean, as far as I could see.

Collings

[unclear] see so much drinking.

MacAdams

Yes, you know. I mean he drank, but all his friends drank, too, so. But it's something--Alcoholics Anonymous has been a major part of my younger brother's life, but not my youngest brother or my sister.

Collings

So what were your interests when you were at St. Mark's School?

MacAdams

I was interested in everything. I was like the guy with the longest list in the senior class yearbook. I mean, I was the president of my senior class, I was the president of the sophomore class, I was the editor of the school paper, I was the captain of the basketball team, I was the lead in the school plays, you know. I mean, I was that kind of a kid, and it was a small school. I mean, I couldn't have done that in a 5,000-person high school, but I loved doing stuff. When I was a senior I started to get into poetry, and everything changed. I started to become broody and dark and weird, you know, and I also got involved in the Civil Rights Movement, and I--

Collings

Now, you were a senior; what was this year exactly?

MacAdams

I graduated from St. Mark's in 1962, and in the end of the fifties, the beginning of the sixties is the civil-rights time, and I got involved in the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas, and started with the NAACP Youth Council, and then--which was basically pretty conservative, traditional, and then the Congress of Racial Equality, CORE guys came in to organize, and all of us wanted to be in

that, because there was more action and less sort of adult supervision. So you know, I participated in sit-ins and various demonstrations in Dallas, and was arrested once. For the white kids, I think, you know, it's not something I thought about at the time, but I've thought about it since then. I think for a lot of the white kids that were involved, and there weren't that many of us, maybe I think the CORE chapter had maybe twenty people, eight of whom were white, that the white kids, this was the first time they'd ever been able to talk to black people on an equal basis. I mean it certainly was for me. I mean, I grew up with maids and yard men and stuff like that. I mean, everybody did in my family circle. I mean, you know, it was like black people were cheap, you know? It was interesting, because there was no--although there was obviously a larger Mexican population in Dallas, had no, no connection. I mean, all maids, all servants, all yard people were all African Americans, so that was my relationship to black people, and CORE really allowed that to change. I think that was true--I know it was true for some of the other kids that were the white kids, and I think it was true for some of the black kids, too.

Collings

Now, at your school were there other kids who were also involved in CORE?

MacAdams

No, no. Well, actually, that's not true. There was one guy who's a year younger than me that was, but most of the kids that I knew were, like, total racist dogs, you know.

Collings

So how did you find out about it?

MacAdams

You know, I was drawn to politics. My parents were liberal, and liberals at a time and in a place where there weren't any other liberals. I remember going to precinct meetings with my family when I was a kid, and the votes on things being basically 187 to 2, so I grew up knowing that we were in a very small minority. But I don't know, I was drawn to politics. I remember being interested in Dwight [D.] Eisenhower's election, which was, what, '52 or something like that. But I was really young. You know, I remember when Stalin died. You know, and there was one newsstand in downtown Dallas that carried non-mainstream publications, and I was sort of like, you know, I was curious about the Young People's Socialist League. I remember this guy, I don't know how, I must have been fourteen or fifteen, some recruiter, because I had sent in something, and some recruiter that came to see me, and I was like this guy wearing sandals and a bad complexion and needed a haircut, and my parents were like, well, who is this?

But I was drawn to politics, and I was drawn increasingly to left-wing politics, and the Civil Rights Movement, and none of my friends were. I mean, there

was this one other guy that became part of it, but he was, like I said, slightly younger, and I didn't really know him that well. Most of my friends would brag about just--I mean, I remember this one guy whose dad was a congressman, would go down to their Civil Rights Movement, civil-rights actions in East Texas, and he'd help man high-intensity fire hoses to--I mean, and was proud of it. You know, that was much more who most of my friends were. Most of my friends were --and most of the kids at St. Mark's were essentially one generation removed from the farm, and they'd made money in some way or another, because it was booming in Texas after the war. Do you know the singer Boz Scaggs?

Collings

Yes.

MacAdams

Boz went to St. Mark's, and Boz was atypical--Boz was a little smarter and a little cooler than most people, but you know, but he was like from Plano when Plano was a cotton mill and a wooden sidewalk, so he was actually from the country compared--most of my friends grew up in Dallas, but their parents were very country, and they still had plenty of country in them, too.

Collings

How did you happen to be in downtown Dallas to see this newsstand?

MacAdams

Good question. You know, I'm not sure of all the time in all that, you know, the times of this, but I remember when I first got my driver's license going downtown and standing, there was like this one corner actually where those two hotels were that one of which my parents met, and it was kind of an odd corner. It went a little bit like Wilshire does here, where it ends and then cut across, just stops and then you have to turn and then go up 7th or 6th. I remember standing there imagining this was what New York was like. I mean, I always was really drawn to New York. I always wanted--you know, in my world at that time, I mean most people didn't want to leave Dallas, but the smart rednecks wanted to come to L.A., and me and a couple of other friends wanted, like the weird girl whose parents were the Marcus family of Neiman Marcus, and a couple of other weird girls were, you know, and me were like the bohemians in this sort of way. But we all knew we had to get out of Dallas, and we didn't really know why.

For me it was politics and then poetry. I mean, my life has been spent on the cusp of poetry and politics, you know, and it was that way then. I think that I saw, you know, when the Beat Generation happened I was a senior in high school, and that was a kind of mixture of poetry and politics, and '62 was the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, when people were starting to try to defend or attack Fidel Castro, and then the Civil Rights Movement was happening, and it

was all, rebellion was in the air, you know, and I was just happy to be part of it. It's funny, it really isn't like that now, you know, and it just isn't. In trying to explain it to people, it seems so distant, but it was really--you know, I mean I was always in the minority, but there was always, even in someplace like Dallas, you know, there were still plenty of people, enough people to be weird to have a few coffeehouses and stuff. And really the Civil Rights Movement I think had a lot to do with it, and then when the Vietnam War happened, that's a whole--people were radicalized because of the draft and all that.

Collings

Do you have any particular memory of the Kennedy assassination; were you in Dallas?

MacAdams

Oh, I wasn't in Dallas. I was in Princeton at that time. I was a freshman at Princeton. I was working on the college radio station, and I happened to be in the room where they had the teletype machine. I don't know if you ever have seen these old roll--it would basically roll out, and--

Collings

Yes, I think I've seen the ones in movies.

MacAdams

Yes, yes, exactly. But you know, they're long gone. But we had one at the Princeton radio station, WPRB, and I happened to be--and you know, when you were like sort of starting out on the college station, one of your first jobs was like being in charge of watching what was coming over the wire service. I remember being there when all of a sudden all these bells started going off, and it was just--and I had it for a long time, and I lost it somewhere--the first transmission, this real garbled transmission, "Shots have been fired at the president's motorcade." You know, and then it just unfolded from there. I mean, you know, nobody that was there at that time forgets where they were at that moment, I think. That's always been my experience.

You know, because I remember when I was in high school watching on TV, the senior lounge, we had a television set, and watching the Kennedy inauguration. Actually, that was, yes, that was in '61. Maybe I was a junior, I had to have been a junior, but somehow I remember at school watching it, you know, and remembering Robert Frost not being able to read the poem because of the glare from the snow, Kennedy being bareheaded, and I remember, you know, like so many people in my generation, identifying with Kennedy and with that whole, with his generation and his politics. So his assassination was just--you know, a lot of people think of it as an end of a kind of innocence, and I don't know if I go along with those kind of terms, but it certainly was profound, a profound shock.

I mean, I'm writing a biography of Jann Wenner, the founder of Rolling Stone right now. Jann and I were talking a while back about that day for him. He was at Berkeley, and he remembers lighting candles and sitting in the dark and staring at the can--you know, just it was--in a way though, again, writing about it, in some ways Bobby Kennedy's assassination was even worse, because I think that it really meant, you know, and Martin Luther King's, because that was really like the sense like, hey, this is over, this idealism is over. With Kennedy it was so shocking, you know, and being from Dallas and knowing exactly where all this stuff, and knowing the climate, how ugly the climate was in Dallas, and how vicious and angry white people were, and what Kennedy represented, you know, just it really couldn't have happened anywhere else. I mean, people spent decades trying to say the Dallas thing, oh, it could have happened anywhere. But no, it was--

Collings

Why did you say it couldn't have happened anywhere else?

MacAdams

You know, I think Dallas at that time and for many years thereafter, I couldn't say if it's true now, but there was like this kind of unholy combination of capitalism and Christianity and racism, just a lot of things came together there. I mean, being--in Dallas at that point, you know, being a really like violent, right-wing, anti-government person was quite socially acceptable in a way that a lot of places, you know, like the elite country-club types wouldn't allow that. But the elite country-club types in Dallas were very much part of that, you know, and it was a political climate. I mean just weeks before Kennedy was assassinated, Adlai Stevenson, who was the ambassador to the United Nations, was hit over the head by a sign, a bunch of people that had attacked him on the street in downtown Dallas. You know, that was really in the air.

Collings

Did you have any kind of religious training growing up?

MacAdams

I was more or less--my mother's family was Jewish, and my dad's mother's family was Jewish, but none of them were Jewish in any very serious way. But I was sent to Sunday school when I was a kid, but it never took on me at all. I never bought it. Mostly I waited till my parents left after dropping me off, and then went across the street to have a donut in the hangout until it was over and my parents would come pick me up. I was never big into monotheism, and I never considered myself Jewish. It's been a source of a lot of, yes, of some complexity in my life, you know, because a lot of people think, well, you're MacAdams, so you must have changed your name, which isn't the truth. I mean, that's my father's name, and his father's name was MacAdams, too. And

I never really hung out in Jewish circles at all, and never went out with Jewish girls.

It's funny. My second wife is the first Jewish girl I ever went out with, and the woman I've been involved with for the last two or three years is Jewish also, but it's never been--it's funny. I mean, I don't--the woman I'm involved with now and I were walking on the Venice boardwalk, and her kids, her son has been bar mitzvah'd, and her daughter will be bat mitzvah'd. We went to a temple, one of the old orthodox temples on the Venice boardwalk, and this is, I don't know, a few months ago, last fall maybe, I don't know. I remember really feeling something, you know. It was partly just because this woman I really care a lot about, you know, and then seeing her on the other side, you know, the men and women are separated. It was funny. It was the first time in my life where I ever had any sense of identification as a Jew.

I mean, I remember going to Israel, my parents sending me to Israel when I was about seventeen or eighteen. I mean, I'd been in Paris and my first wife then, well, we were still, just had really gotten to know each other. She was in Paris, and so I had to leave that, being eighteen years old in Paris with a beautiful young woman, and having to go to relatives in Tel Aviv, you know, and it was just like, what am I doing here? And I hated it. And everybody was constantly on my case about, "When are you going to emigrate to Israel?" And I'm saying, "I'm an American." "Yeah, and that's what the German Jews thought, too." And I really resented and rejected that aspect of my life. You know, I mean, I've been called a self-hating Jew more than once in my life, you know, and maybe there's--I mean, I don't think I hate myself, but I certainly never really thought of myself as Jewish. I have four kids, and none of them have been raised as Jews. And my second wife, even though she's Jewish, was never--she's probably been to temple twice in her life. The woman I'm with now is somewhat more Jewish in a way. I mean, her family identifies, I think, with the State of Israel in a way that I certainly don't.

Collings

Was there pressure on other kids in your family to emigrate to Israel, or was it just because you happened to be over there?

MacAdams

Yes, I think it was just that I happened to be there. It certainly wasn't coming from anybody in the U.S. They did want me to go there, and I don't think any of my siblings ever have been to Israel, as far as I know. I could be wrong about that, but I don't think so. You know, and it wasn't, it really, it wasn't a factor in my life, and it still isn't really. I mean, it's not something I think about much, unless somebody else brings it up.

Collings

Okay, so you apply to college, and, clearly, you headed straight for the East Coast, given the kind of thing--

MacAdams

Yes, yes.

Collings

Not Berkeley, or?

MacAdams

Never--well, I was a pretty good basketball player, and I always had a correspondence with the Stanford coach, but that was--I didn't really want to go to college. I felt it was really a big mistake in, you know, thinking of that in my life. It was a big mistake to have gone to college directly from high school. I wasn't ready, and it was just not--if I'd taken a year off I would have had a very different college experience, I think. You know, I'd only applied to two colleges. I applied to Princeton and Yale, and I didn't get into Yale, I got into Princeton, so I went to Princeton. And I could see that by just applying to those two schools that I was sort of hoping, you know, subconsciously, that I didn't go to college for a year. I was not mature enough for it, and I was--I was on the edge of making the freshman team, but I also had really discovered poetry, and I'd started smoking pot, and I was starting to hang out with, you know, finding a few other weirdos that were interested in poetry. And even though I played basketball my freshman year, I'd really kind of lost the interest, and I wasn't quite good enough. If I'd hadn't lost the desire for it, I think I could have done okay, but those were also the years Princeton had--where Bill [William Warren] Bradley was at Princeton. He was a year ahead of me, and you know, it was the years of the glory years of Princeton basketball, and the only Ivy League team to finish and make the final four, the NCAA tournament. So they had really good teams, you know, and I never would have been a star. I never would have been a starter I don't think, but I could have played, I think. But I was just getting weird. You know, once I got to Princeton, which is only an hour's bus ride from New York, I basically got more and more into being in New York than in Princeton, and you know, started meeting poets and really hanging out learning my craft, and there was no creative writing department at Princeton, and I was too immature to appreciate what was there, so I really kind of rejected it, and didn't--I finished almost last in my class, really barely graduated, and never have been back to Princeton since the day I graduated. I just never--it just didn't take, you know. My real education was in New York, was on the Lower East Side, you know, and hanging around Alan Ginsberg and Gregory Corso and all the great, the beatnik poets. I mean, those were the guys that I had started to really admire in high school, and read "On the Road," and you know, like a lot of people my age, and that became--you know, I met Frank O'Hara, John Ashbury, Kenneth Coke and a lot of younger poets. You know, I

really, that's where my education came, and Princeton I would come back on weekends for parties, basically.

I mean, I can't remember a single course that I enjoyed. My faculty adviser was the one guy I really respected, was a guy named Richard Blackmur, R.P. Blackmur, who was at the time considered a major critic, and a guy who had never gone to college, and somehow he got to teach at--because he grew up during the depression, never could afford to. But then when I met him he was already an older man and was not well, and he died in the middle of my first year as his student. He was the only guy at Princeton that I ever really respected, you know, that I felt like was really a writer of accomplishment. There were some writers there, but there's nobody whose work really moved me, and I was a snob, you know. I was immature and very arrogant, and was meeting real poets, and not people that wrote about real poets from another generation, you know, so that's really, Princeton kind of went by in a blur, and I really, you know, I had trouble with grades and with--I got kicked out once for having a girl in my dorm after eight o'clock. It was still an all-boys school then, and you know, everything, all over the United States there was stuff happening, and Princeton was like this backwater, you know, at that time. So there was a lot of impatience about that.

And the Vietnam War was happening, and I was getting radicalized politically, and understanding politics. I met Tom Hayden for the first time. I guess I was a sophomore in college, and he was doing the Newark Project, which is where SDS really grew out of. There were two--I don't know if you know John Wiener, he's a historian at Riverside-U.C. [University of California] Irvine, whatever.

Collings

I've heard the name, yes.

MacAdams

Yes, John was a Princeton guy, and he and I were close friends in those days, and we're still good friends, but you know, there was--and there's a guy named Bob [Robert] Edelman, he's a history professor at U.C. San Diego, who was also there at the same time, and you know, there were just a handful of us, but we were like the--we were the SDS chapter at Princeton, so we were--but at the same time I was in an eating club, you know, and was the head of [inaudible], which is like the rush version. I mean, I had a lot of different aspects of my own personality that were at play all the time, but really I was, New York was where I got my education.

And then I went to the University of Buffalo for two years after that and got an M.A., and that's where my academic education all came from. I mean, that's where I really learned the systems of thought, you know.

Collings

Were you concerned about being drafted once you got out of school?

MacAdams

I actually returned my draft card to my draft board, and after that I only corresponded with them in rhymed couplets. I was really radical at that time, you know, in terms of that. I mean, there were these war boards if you had to take, and if you had a high enough score you wouldn't get drafted. I mean, it's all just seems insane right now, but I've noticed that they're starting to talk about the draft again. It'll be interesting to see if that happens. You know, I didn't take--

Collings

But with the stock market crash we probably won't have to worry about that [unclear].

MacAdams

Yes, maybe so, a lot of ex-brokers going into the--that'll be the day. I really--I declared as a conscientious objector. I was rejected as a conscientious objector, and I was finally declared mentally incompetent. You know, I was a couple of years older than most of the kids, and I was really, you know, there were just simple--you know, I just had made up my mind this was a real test, and that I couldn't lie, and I couldn't--I wasn't going to go to Canada, and I wasn't going to go in the army, and so I had to figure out how to get out.

Collings

[phone rings] Let me just pause.

MacAdams

We were talking, oh, the draft. I didn't--when I went to my first draft physical, I didn't have on--I decided not to wear underwear, and so when they tell you to take off your pants I was naked, and so they made me put my pants back on. And so I was already differentiated from the guys that were just like going, you know, were just cannon fodder essentially. You know, and I just, once I understood that that was the case, I just did everything backwards, or didn't, just refused to cooperate in any way, and ultimately they decided--I remember the psychiatrist, the phrase that stuck with me since then, "You may call them visions. We call them paranoid ideations," and I knew I was home free.

Collings

Whatever. [laughs]

MacAdams

Yes, you know. So eventually that was just, I was declared that I was not--and you know, they were right, you know, I wasn't--and I tried everything to try to get other kids to do what I was doing, I remember, in both--I had two draft physicals, and both times I just, you know, I was just like, "You don't have to go through, you don't have to go into Vietnam." But I just remember feeling so frustrated, you know, because none of these kids could even see that they had

that option ultimately, because in their minds they didn't have that option. I remember people just looking at me like, what's wrong with you? But I knew what I was doing, and I got out of the army that way.

Then I can't remember, that was after graduate school, yes, because I'd gone to graduate school just from Princeton, because I got a teaching fellowship, and that was a period when Nelson Rockefeller was trying to build up the State University of New York system, and Buffalo was hiring huge numbers of poets to teach freshman composition, and it was an amazing scene. I mean, that really was the really, the most intellectual part of my life, and really where I, like I said, it's where I got the sort of intellectual structure that I never even knew existed at Princeton. You know, at Princeton it just wasn't like that. Buffalo was really active, and people hung out in bars talking a lot, because the weather was so horrible, so, you know, it was either that or go bowling.

And then in sixty--and I had met this woman, who I married eventually, when she was in high school in Princeton, and I was a junior in Princeton. She went on to Radcliffe, and I--but after her freshman year we got married, and that was my first year of draft or my first year of graduate school, and I made it through to get my, to finish the M.A. work. I don't think I ever actually got the diploma, but I did the work. And she and I and a couple of other people headed west, you know, and went to--well, we aimed at Bolinas, which, we'd aimed at San Francisco. We had gone out there--I guess we got married in '67? I can't remember exactly, but we'd gone out to San Francisco during the Summer of Love, and I was like, I want to be here. And in Buffalo, like, everybody was imitating, trying to, was you know, studying the San Francisco Oracle, and wanting to be, trying somehow to transform Buffalo into San Francisco, which didn't quite work. But I mean, it was really--

Collings

Not during the winter.

MacAdams

Not during the winter, no. No love-ins in the winter, except inside. But San Francisco was really the sort of clarion call, you know. That's where we, me and my friends in Buffalo really thought that's where it was happening, and a lot of my--a number of people that I am still friends with were at Buffalo and ended up in the Bay Area, you know, and really because of that. It just seemed like it was the center of the new culture. You know, but then, that's when I got called to my second draft physical, and got distracted for months, and then eventually got to the Bay Area.

And you know, there were a lot of drugs. I was doing a lot of speed. My wife is a much milder person than I was, but she was--you know, I thought I acted like I knew what I was doing, or what I wanted, and she didn't know what she wanted, so she basically went along with me, and you know, it was a lot of

LSD, a lot of amphetamines. I mean, we were living all over San Francisco, living in North Beach hotels. She was dancing in a topless place and I was a barker, you know. It's like the Bob Dylan song. And just, and then we started traveling, and we spent almost a year traveling in North Africa and all over Europe, just hitchhiking around, and then came back, and then we lived in Bolinas, which is a little hippie village in Northern California. And I don't know how much--I'm kind of tired of doing this.

Collings

Okay, all right. Let's stop then.

MacAdams

Yes, I mean, I feel like there's just a zillion things more, but I'm sort of--

Collings

Yes. [End of interview]

1.2. Session 2 (January 10, 2008)

MacAdams

--northern New Mexico since I was a teenager has always been part of my life. I had a high school teacher that spent the summers in Taos, and I hitchhiked in to visit him once after my senior year, and ever since then Taos has kind of been on my circuit, and a few years ago, maybe four or five years ago I went to some event in northern New Mexico, and some friends of mine in Taos and I went to visit what had been one of the main country-hippie communes in the sixties and the seventies, a place called New Buffalo, and at that point they were going through a whole--this is, you know, probably in the late nineties--somebody had ended up owning the land, and those people were trying to figure out a way to make money off of it, and to put in a bed and breakfast and stuff, and we were--and then the other old hippies were like complaining, like, "You're desecrating our space," blah, blah, blah.

They had a kiva, which was also, I think, partly a cooking kitchen, and so you'd kind of go down some steps, or down a ramp or something into this kiva, and it just seemed like we were on an archaeological dig. It was like, it seemed like from such a long time ago, you know.

Collings

What was down there?

MacAdams

There was just a dirt floor and some blankets, and a wood stove. But I guess because it was covered and it was in the earth, it just seemed ancient, because it was a kind of an ancient form that you know, people in the sixties and seventies had adopted, and it worked for a while, and then New Buffalo fell apart like so many of the country communes did. I mean, I'm not aware of any that didn't, in

some form or another. But some of them, I think, have evolved, you know, and I think that's one of the things about Bolinas is that it's really evolved. It doesn't--I mean, even though if you went to Bolinas today, you know, it just depends on how you look at it. I mean, when I'm in Bolinas today I see this as still being very much part of the community, especially something like this, an image of people voting and of people active in politics, and I guess that's the Marin County Civic Center, you know, and in that sense it's a highly civic town, and remains so.

MacAdams

They're actually doing a historical project. They have I guess the only museum, the only homegrown museum in Marin County is the Bolinas Museum, which is more or less a historical museum, and they're putting together a show about the seventies, you know. So I was talking to the people that are doing that, and they're, you know, they were just like me, except a lot more together than I was in that period, but the same kinds of issues are still--I mean, we set some things on the road, and some things that have lasted and remained valid, but you know, it's thirty years later. But people are thinking about community in exactly the same way.

Collings

Well, how did Bolinas become the kind of town where it seems like a sort of counterculture community, and a local, you know, rural community; it seemed like they were able to live in sort of harmony?

MacAdams

It's an interesting question, and I think part of it just has to do with the time, and part of it has to do with the place. I think that the time part is that Bolinas is kind of, was or is kind of one of the southernmost hippie villages. But I mean, if you go Northern California, you know, there's a lot of influence. I mean it's almost like Amish or something. I mean it's--

Collings

Right. That's a good way of putting it, yes.

MacAdams

It's a world that's thriving, you know, and it's just not cool particularly anymore, but it's very real and has a lot of influence on how people live in Northern California, especially in rural Northern California. But Bolinas was an odd connection of a lot of things, partly because it's close enough to San Francisco that, you know, you wouldn't just be bored to death growing potatoes, so I mean there is really an aspect of Bolinas that's influenced by the city. And in a certain--it's not a suburb. The roads are too tough. I mean, I just got an e-mail from a friend in Bolinas yesterday who says, she said that they hadn't had electricity for the last week, because of the rains. So everybody, you know, people living by candlelight, and that's very, I mean it's very real, even if

it's close to the city. So you aren't in the city, you're not on the city grid exactly. So you really can have some of both worlds in Bolinas, and I think that was a factor.

MacAdams

And I think that it was, you know, just the things that were maybe unique was that it was basically--I mean Bolinas' evolution was pretty rapid, just like the evolution of the Bolinas Lagoon. I mean, it was a timber town. A lot of San Francisco is built from the redwoods that were shipped by boat from Bolinas to San Francisco. Then it quickly became, after all that was gone, became a dairy in town, and then it became a kind of a summerhouse town, but always very small, and always with--there were some real, powerful ecological consciousness there, people kind of upper-class San Franciscans that were aware of these kinds of issues that, long before the hippies. I mean Peter Bear , who's a state senator, was there, was from around there and had a summerhouse there. A guy, his name is escaping me right now, that created--there was the first Democratic congressman elected from Northern--from that north of San Francisco, back when there was only one congressman from San Francisco to the California border, Oregon border, who quickly became a New Frontiersman with Kennedy in '60 and '62 rather, and helped--and established the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

MacAdams

You know, so there was some groundwork already there, and then there were these intense threats that came up, you know. I mean the Army Corps of Engineers, which you can always rely on for backward thinking, an easy enemy, easy target because it moves so slow. You know, they wanted to build this outfall pipe and the sewer of the entire mesa, with Bolinas Mesa where most people lived, and was--I don't know if I mentioned this the last time we talked, but Bolinas Mesa was divided up into twenty-by-a hundred lots in like the 1920s, as a--

Collings

Yes, there's a nice picture of it here somewhere. Well, this is a map.

MacAdams

Yes, but it's a gridded--they gridded the entire mesa and sold, and gave away twenty-by-a hundred lots with newspaper subscriptions in San Francisco, and so hundreds if not thousands of people had twenty-by-a hundred lots, and they were unbuildable because they were on septic tanks and the soil is very heavy clay, and septic tanks don't work very well there. So they were forced to--the county wouldn't give building permits unless you had a larger lot.

MacAdams

And when the Corps of Engineers--I mean, one of the reasons that they were sewerage the mesa, because the Corps does things not--I mean, they pretend it's

science, but it's usually politics. They knew that obviously if you sewered the mesa, then every one of these lots could be developed, and so it created--so that people, even people that weren't necessarily hippies, or necessarily enviros were aware of the threat to this--

Collings

An existential crisis.

MacAdams

Right, exactly. You know, and then, of course, 1970 was the first Earth Day, and so people were starting to be aware of that. Then this big oil spill happened, in which the whole community got together to keep, to save the Bolinas Lagoon, which brought together people that didn't know each other, and gave everybody a common battle and a common mythology, really, that was very active when I was, all the ten years I lived in Bolinas, and still has, it's still sort of, it's sort of receded into the mists of time a little bit, but it's still something people can call on and do, call on that memory and the people that were involved, and, of course, everybody has completely different memories of it by now, but--you know, so all those factors, and then all these young hippies moving to the country, I mean, after the Summer of Love in '67.

MacAdams

I mean by '68 and '69 a lot of the original hippies, I mean, seeing what a disaster the Haight Ashbury had become, were looking for other places to live, and you know, they were spreading out all over Northern California. Then, plus Bolinas for me personally, because so many poets were there, I mean, a non-joke joke was there's a lot more poets than plumbers, and that was quite true, you know, and that's really what brought me there, I mean, aside from the great natural beauty, which Bolinas is a beautiful a place as I've ever seen, and still is. It's the least-changed place on the California coast that I'm aware of. You know, so all those factors were at play. But for me it was really because of the poetry scene. My first wife and I--I don't know how much if we talked about this the last time--

Collings

Well, actually, last time you just got up to that you mentioned that you had gone to University of Buffalo, and--

MacAdams

So I hadn't gotten from Buffalo to Bolinas yet.

Collings

No, no. And you sort of mentioned kind of like just alluded to the fact that you had gone out for the Summer of Love in San Francisco, but that was all sort of like in kind of a summary form, like, oh, we can get to that later.

MacAdams

All right. Well, I was going to Buffalo. My first wife and I had just been married right before then. She had been at Radcliffe, and I'd been at Princeton. I was a couple of years older than her. And she, when we got married she dropped out of Radcliffe and came to live with me in Buffalo, and there was an amazing poetry scene in Buffalo in the late sixties, and it went on for--and still is a major poetry scene. It was a period when Nelson Rockefeller was governor of New York, and he was trying to make the New York State system emulate the California State system, which was in the post-Pat [Governor Edmund G.] Brown era, booming, and everything in California was golden. So they put huge budgets into the state university system, and Buffalo, which had been a state college, became Buffalo State University.

MacAdams

And they were hiring. There was a wonderful guy named Albert Cook, who was the head of the English Department, and he really took it on as his mission to hire as many poets as he could. And you know, there were some disasters that came out of that, that were kind of amazing in and of themselves. But there was a gathering of really great poets, you know, poets of several different schools. I mean, Robert Haas, who's sort of famous now, who's the poet laureate, was there. He was like in one circle, and I was in a very different circle, but there were several circles, you know. They were all feeling completely superior to all the other circles.

MacAdams

The circle that I kind gravitated to was a natural, because I was already very influenced by Donald Allen's New American poetry anthology, *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960*, which was the anthology that really brought all the poets, the beatniks and the Black Mountain [College]'s, and the San Francisco Renaissance, and all the different poetry, the vanguard poetry schools all together for the first time. I was in high school when that came out, and I was just like it blew my mind, and really influenced me, and really influenced a lot of people. And Buffalo was kind of the Black Mountain School forward. I mean, Black Mountain had closed down in the mid-fifties finally. I mean, it was never very big, and it always just limped along, and they just kind of shut down in the early mid-fifties, sort of over a period of several years.

MacAdams

Did you happen to see the review I did of Joanne Kyger and Philip Whalen's collected poems? It was in the L.A. Times a couple of Sundays ago in the Book Review.

Collings

I know, yes.

MacAdams

Yes, because I talked a little bit about San Francisco.

Collings

But I'll take a look at that, and we can come back to that later.

MacAdams

Yes, you know, but it just, I just found myself saying some things that I'd said in there.

Collings

Okay, so we can come back to that.

MacAdams

Sure. But anyway, so I mean there were poets like Robert Creeley, who's at Buffalo, John Barth, the novelist, who was at Buffalo. There was many, many poets passing through there, and Gregory Corso passed through there. Charles Olson was sort of the godhead of the whole thing, who was at Black Mountain, and the last director of Black Mountain, and then he was hired to come to Buffalo, which he only could last a year or two, but his disciple, the guy named Jack Clark, took over his Myth and Literature course, which was the sort of central academic, avant garde academic tent pole for this whole group of people I was around, all of whom stayed poets, and you know, none of them particularly have been super famous, but all working, practicing poets, I mean.

Collings

What kind of students were at this program? I mean, were they from the New York State area?

MacAdams

As I remember it, I mean, it's a pretty large university. But to me at that time, the people that I was most--the students that found me, and the students that I found tended to be from the New York City area, and they tended to be, you know, hippies and beatniks, drug addicts. There was a lot of drugs around Buffalo at that time, and a lot of the people that were bringing--you know, hard drugs. There was a lot of heroin there. Cocaine hadn't really gotten to Buffalo too much, but heroin was a real presence. And Buffalo is so cold, and the weather is so horrible that basically you spend the winter, which goes for like six months, indoors.

MacAdams

So, I mean, I had classes that met in bars regularly, and Bob Creeley was one person whose class often met in bars. But a lot of the people that I studied with, we would meet at alcohol watering holes, because you couldn't be outside really. I mean, the only other choice was bowling. It's like Buffalo is like the bowling-shirt capital of the world. But a lot of the poets were also hanging around New York, and we were all, like, all my friends were graduate students, doing teaching for \$3,000 plus tuition or something. I mean, it was just barely, barely, barely enough to scrape by on.

MacAdams

You know, and I for one, and many of my friends, you know, knew the 400 miles of the New York Thruway moving back and forth for weekends, you know. So it was a very vital and alive situation, and when Phoebe and I got married, and I was teaching there and working on my master's degree in English there--they didn't have creative writing in those days, and I've still never taken a creative-writing course, and I'm sort of embarrassed to admit I actually taught a few, but never really believed that it was possible--

Collings

To teach?

MacAdams

Yes, yes. So I had a friend at the time who I didn't know too well yet, who was a guy named Tom Clark, who's a wonderful poet, and has written many biographies, and he's a very, very prolific writer, has been, and Tom got married. Tom had just really no money. I mean Phoebe and I had a little money from our families, enough to rent an apartment. But we were also incredibly young. I mean, I was twenty-one or twenty-two I guess by this time, and Phoebe was like nineteen or twenty, you know, and I just can't believe we got married. I don't know, maybe I mentioned this the last time, about my parents sending us to see this rabbi to counsel with us?

Collings

No.

MacAdams

He said, "You guys shouldn't get married. You should just live together for a while," obviously seeing how young and immature we were, and when I told my parents, came back to my parents, my parents went nuts, you know, especially my father, you know, who'd really loved, thought this rabbi was going--

Collings

To set you straight?

MacAdams

Yes. And, of course, he was totally right, you know. I could just see myself in his position, looking at me at that age and Phoebe at that age. But my parents wanted us to get married, and her mother--her dad was a doctor who'd gone insane, and so he didn't really have any part in it. But we were, you know, really in love, and so we got married and lived in Buffalo. And then Tom Clark married a woman named Angelica Hoenig, who's an Australian woman, or an Englishwoman who had lived and grown up in a commune in Australia, and their honeymoon consisted of them coming to Buffalo and Phoebe and I giving them our bed, and we slept in the living room.

MacAdams

At that time I was finishing up my master's, finishing up the work for my master's, but really kind of running out of steam in terms of the academic world. I did get my master's, but it was one of those master's which is like, "Here's your master's. Don't ask about a Ph.D.," you know, just, "We'll see you later." Which was just fine with me, because I'd exhausted my interest, although definitely Buffalo was really where the kind of intellectual structure of my life was laid down. Princeton I'd paid almost no attention to. I mean, it was just a place to go to New York from, and to be a sort of brooding college poet, you know. I mean, I was already very--but there were almost no poets. There was maybe three or four people at Princeton that were interested in poetry, and none of them were teachers, or interested in the kind of poetry that I was interested in anyway, so New York was where I spent most of my four college years. But Buffalo I really, really got my intellectual grounding in the Charles Olson world.

MacAdams

Anyway, it was Olson had gone, and I had really, I just wasn't interested in whether this--the war was going on. I had been involved in Students for a Democratic Society [SDS] in a kind of a peripheral way through college and in graduate school, and I was basically, I had turned in my draft card and sent it back to my draft board, and vowed only to communicate with them in rhymed couplets. I was very influenced by kind of the attitude of dope, rock and roll, and fucking in the streets, very influenced by kind of cultural revolutionaries like Ed Sanders, who remains one of the great American poets, and who ran a press called Fuck You: The Magazine of the Arts, and it was where a lot of great poetry was published, and it was mimeographed, and it was a kind of mythology then as the Lower East Side was really where the poets lived.

MacAdams

The West Village had become too expensive, and the East Village, you know, was dangerous in those days. It was nasty, and that's where all my friends lived. But I really had kind of an inflated sense of myself as a cultural revolutionary, as did most--well, you know, I was different even then than a lot of my friends. Most of my friends, even though we shared the same poetry heroes, and I wasn't into civic life in Buffalo, particularly, because I was just, you know, civic life in Buffalo was like the Italians running the government, so it was very old school and kind of ethnic politics.

MacAdams

But I was very involved, when SDS split up in the Days of Rage in Chicago in '68 I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to go underground, which is what a lot of SDS people did, because it just seemed ridiculous, you know. I mean, I was at least that together to see that. And I didn't want to go to Canada.

MacAdams

And Phoebe and I had lived--one of the places that we lived was quite near the Peace Bridge that went to Canada, and our house was a place where people that were fleeing the draft would come, and then people would come across the bridge to get them, you know, so--

Collings

Oh, that's really interesting.

MacAdams

Yes, you know, it was a kind of a freedom underground.

Collings

It's almost like an Underground Railway--

MacAdams

Yes, it was very much so, because you know, I had my first draft physical in Buffalo after I'd turned back my draft card, which was highly influenced by Jonathan Schell. You know who Orville [Schell] is. Well, Jonathan's his big brother who was a New Yorker writer, and he was the first reporter really to come back from Vietnam with real information that I was aware of. So after I turned in my draft card, the draft board went after me. I'd applied for conscientious objector status and couldn't--they wouldn't give it.

Collings

And you talked about when you went in for your physical.

MacAdams

Oh yes, I already told you all this. Yes.

Collings

That was a great story.

MacAdams

Yes. Well, you know, I was slightly older and slightly more intellectually involved than most of the people that were being drafted, and the kinds of kids that were brought to our place and then taken to Canada tended to be those same kind of people, which were, well, not quite, because the people that were getting drafted were just sheep in a certain way, and they didn't know they had any choice, and the kids that were going to Canada at least felt they had enough choice to split. But it was something that I've never kind of gotten over, you know, that kind of sense of people having to flee their country.

Collings

Did you talk to any of them?

MacAdams

Yes, you know. They were all kinds of small-town kids, mostly kids who weren't sophisticated politically at all, just frightened, didn't want to go to Vietnam, didn't know what else to do but split. I can't remember the numbers I've read, but I mean, you know, twenty, thirty, a hundred thousand, lots of people. I mean, I'm talking about in our house, you know, ten over a couple of

years. But I was really befuddled. I didn't know what to do, and I was taking a lot of drugs, especially it was really the most LSD I've ever taken was in Buffalo.

MacAdams

And when Tom and Angelica showed up to live in our, to stay in--I mean, their honeymoon just went on. They didn't have anywhere else really to go. I think I'm conflating a few things and telescoping them, but basically we all decided to go to California together. Tom and Angelica were going to go to Bolinas, and we were going to go to San Francisco area, we were going to check out Bolinas.

MacAdams

I think we had been there. I think this poet named John Thorpe, or Shao as he's known now, and his woman Renee were already there. Yes, they were. And so the summer of '67 when we'd come to the Summer of Love, I think we'd come to Bolinas just for a brief moment, to go see Shao and meet Renee. I remember Phoebe got her camera stolen out of the car, so--

Collings

In Bolinas?

MacAdams

In Bolinas.

Collings

Oh no. That's not supposed to happen.

MacAdams

Right. Well, you know, but that was good because it sort of reminded us that this was the real world, you know, and there's plenty of kind of downtown flotsam, just as there is now, just sort of homeless, lost people. So we were on the Ohio Turnpike, Thruway, whatever, and we blew a tire and the car spun out, and we tumbled over a few times.

Collings

Oh, gosh.

MacAdams

Phoebe and I were wearing seatbelts, and somehow miraculously not hurt. I mean, the problem as I realized later was that we were carrying way too much weight in the car, you know, all the possessions of four people. The tire just blew, and Phoebe was driving at the time and put on the brakes instead of not putting on the brakes and just kind of easing it over to the side of the road. And Tom broke his collarbone, and Angelica wasn't--Tom was the only one who was hurt. I still remember him laying beside of the road and sort of gesturing to me to come over, and saying, "The dope's in my pocket," you know. So I reached, I got his pot and his pills and stuff, and pretended to sort of stagger across the freeway and put it down in the ditch before a police car stopped.

MacAdams

But then I'd already had my first physical, I guess, yes, in Buffalo, and then my draft--my second, the draft board in Dallas came after me next. So I got sidetracked--

[Interruption, not transcribed]

MacAdams

Anyway, so--

Collings

Okay. You had had a car accident, and then [unclear] draft--

MacAdams

Yes, then I had to go to Dallas for my draft physical, and I remember one of those, the people on the draft board in Dallas who were interviewing me as wanting to be a conscientious objector saying, "Now, Lewis, if someone went over to Vietnam and got an arm shot off, or a leg, would you say you were morally superior to them by not going?" And the whole thing was like that. And they denied that. But then at that point the psychiatrist, the army psychiatrist kicked in, and they knew they didn't want me.

MacAdams

And I was telling him about various dreams I had, and various--and they were like, I remember the line as I've used it many times, actually. This psychiatrist in the Dallas Draft Board said, "Well, you may call them visions. We call them paranoid ideations." So whatever, you know, just let me out of here. So finally they declared me mentally incompetent, and Phoebe and I moved on to California.

MacAdams

And we didn't live in Bolinas at that point. Tom and Angelica had found it a very, very, very inexpensive place, and this was at a time when, (a), the country was rich, and there was a lot of public welfare, and people like my friend the great poet Joanne Kyger, I mean, bought a little house while she was on welfare, as did her friend Nancy Whitefield. You know, you could buy a house in Bolinas, not a fancy house, but a dwelling for twelve, fifteen thousand dollars at that time in 1970. And so some people were settling down. I was unfortunately not among them.

MacAdams

And Phoebe and I went on to San Francisco, and we lived in a commune on Potrero Hill, which then was still kind of a Russian neighborhood on the south edge of San Francisco, overlooking this housing project where O.J. Simpson grew up.

Collings

Oh, really.

MacAdams

Yes, a really terrible neighborhood, terrible part of town. But Potrero Hill was-- I don't know if you know that neighborhood, but it was nice then. It was very sunny and great views, depending on which direction you were looking in, and cheap, and we lived there. That's when I met Jann Wenner, who I've been writing about for the last two or three years, the founder of Rolling Stone. And then we traveled a lot. We traveled for like eight months. We were traveling in North Africa, and hitchhiked from Egypt to Morocco and back, and just then spent a bunch of time in Western Europe.

MacAdams

And when we came back we went--because we had been to Bolinas maybe, living in the year or two I guess this was in San Francisco, we went to Bolinas a couple of times, and we really liked it. And by that time there were a lot of poets there. There was Bill Berkson, who's now--
[long sounds of sirens passing by; conversation pauses]

Collings

Busy day.

MacAdams

Yes, it's always like this. Bill Berkson, who was an art critic and a very handsome guy from New York, who went to Cal--went to Bolinas, and there was all these poets of the kind of Lower East Side poets that were my friends, my age. They were all either passing through, stopping there for a while. Gordon Baldwin, who went on to become a curator at the Getty [Museum], photography curator at the Getty was then in Bolinas, and Joanne Kyger was already there. She was with a painter named Jack Boyce. There was, Tom and Angelica were there, John Thorpe Shao was there, and a bunch of other poets. I mean, it really became by the beginning of the seventies a remarkable place in terms of poetry, and you know, not only to people that lived there, but the people visiting there.

MacAdams

Most of the poets--and Phoebe and I lived at a house overlooking the Pacific Ocean, and a really cool little dwelling. It had been a summer house, and the owner had sort of plate-glass-windowed in the garage, and this poet Ted Berrigan and his wife Alice Notley, who was then just in her early twenties, and has gone on to becoming, you know, one of the best poets of our generation, of my generation. She and Ted were living in there, and basically just shooting speed, and going out at night to the bar, the only bar in town, and sort of just living--I mean, sort of the common thread of a lot of this was that Phoebe had a bit of money and I had a tiny bit of money, and a lot of our friends didn't, so we were sort of marked as the philanthropists, which was ridiculous in retrospect, but, in fact, you know, there was some truth in it.

MacAdams

And so, I mean compared to most of our friends. So Ted and Alice lived in our shed, and Tom Clark and Angelica lived up the street, or the road, I mean it was a dirt road, so there was constant presence of poets in our lives. And our first kid was born, Ocean, who's now thirty-five, so everybody was having babies. Angelica and Tom had a kid who's the same age as Ocean. It was just, we were young breeders, you know.

MacAdams

And so there was a huge amount of poetry, like Aram Saroyan arrived there with his family. There was, I don't know, I mean Bill Brown, who had been part of a kind of American Northwest world. Philip Whalen, the great poet, lived in Bolinas for a while at that time, you know, on and on. But Ted Berrigan, who was an important teacher of mine, you know, one of the main teachers of mine, especially when he'd been on the Lower East Side, when he'd been married before to a woman named Sandy Berrigan.

MacAdams

And he very strongly disagreed with what I was doing. I had already become-- because of this oil spill I had met a bunch of kind of community activists.

Collings

So you were in town at the time of the oil spill.

MacAdams

Yes. We had just arrived two months before, or something like that, a very few months before, really only knew the poets that we had known before, and a couple that we'd met there, but mostly people we already knew. And suddenly there was this civic event, which was building this log boom over the mouth of the Bolinas, of the channel into Bolinas Lagoon, and we were all part of this amazing civic endeavor that lasted for, I don't know, a week or something like that.

Collings

All parts of the local community?

MacAdams

Yes, everybody came out. I mean, Bolinas still it's population is only two or three thousand people, and I'm sure it was probably half that then. No, maybe not, maybe three-quarters then. I mean, it hasn't really grown that much. It's grown some, but not much. And so I met people like Peter Warshall, who went on to become a really well-known ecologist and editor of the Whole Earth Review, and a very close friend and rival of mine. We kept falling in love with the same women, so it was like, we had a very--we still have a very complicated relationship. And a guy named Greg Hewlett, who was a civic, community organizer by profession, and then several other people.

MacAdams

We started this thing called the Bolinas Future Studies Center, and it was named a little bit after this thing in Buffalo that we did, called Further Studies, which was kind of an intellectual karass or something. But Future Studies was really kind of a combination of, we came together to fight against this Army Corps of Engineers project, but also to sort of--

Collings

Was the sewage project--

MacAdams

Yes, the sewage project. But it was also about creating a different future for the community.

Collings

What do you mean by that?

MacAdams

Well, I mean coming up with ideas about the Bolinas Community Plan grew out of that, which was a really extraordinary gathering of people that really did a whole community plan, which basically became the Bolinas Community Plan, because Bolinas isn't incorporated. It doesn't have a mayor, police. The police were the County Sheriffs and State Highway Patrol, and we began to see quite early that you could control a lot of the politics of a community if you took over the Public Utility District, which was the only elected body really in town. The school board even was a union school district with Stinson Beach, which was a much more summer home town, slightly toward, closer to the city than Bolinas, and was more--didn't really have as strong a sort of a hippie population.

MacAdams

And you know, out of that grew a lot of ideas. I mean, I began to see that this was something I was really just naturally drawn to, and was pretty good at. But Ted and Alice, especially Ted and Tom Clark, and maybe other poets, too, I don't know, but because they were so around me all the time, they really kind of disapproved of what I was doing. They felt that I wasn't tending to my business, poetically speaking.

Collings

Yes, because I'd wanted to ask you how your political interests and your arts interests were working together, because up to this point it seems like those were entirely different worlds.

MacAdams

They were. And this was the first time that I began to see them as a single world. But my friends didn't, and they felt that I was wasting a lot of time and going to meetings, etc., and at that point it hadn't sort of reached crisis proportions, so I thought it was cool, and I didn't really think about money. We

had a little, and so, you know, and a lot of real-world issues I managed to evade for a while. You know, but it challenged me that way.

MacAdams

And Tom and Ted actually wrote a long sort of collaborative poem called "Bolin's Eye Wash," which had some sort of snide references to what I was doing. You know, I was mostly just confused by it. I wasn't really hurt or anything particularly, but I just--you know, because I felt, maybe they're right. And that began what has really been a kind of an ongoing study of, like, poets that are in politics, who were in politics, I mean, and really kind of trying to understand what I had in common with these people. I mean it was like William Yeats and Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, Andrew Marvel, and then going into, you know, up to the present, I mean people like Alan Ginsberg, whose work was incredibly political, and who's totally engaged in the political process.

MacAdams

Or even Robert Duncan, who's a great San Francisco poet, whose work was very much a kind of visionary--it's the kind of a vision of a world without war, or how to--but he was a very important poet in the San Francisco area at that time. And there was--I'm just counting, because I wasn't particularly interested in a lot of the kind of, quote, "political antiwar poets," I mean, because I'd felt my work was--I mean it wasn't as political as political poets, generally speaking, but it was definitely engaged, or my life was really engaged. My poetry, you know, it had elements of what I was doing, but I mean my poetry has always been primarily kind of personal, and, "I do this, I do that," poems, as Frank O'Hara said. But I was challenged by that and confused by that, and, you know, then--

Collings

Well, I was going to ask you if there were culture wars in Bolinas, and I was thinking of it as being like between the sort of long-term local residents and these other people which they're not really an intentional community per se, but--

MacAdams

Right, right. Which was I think a good thing. I mean, intentional communities, people's intentions seem to change.

Collings

But then again they were people who came from the outside with their own kind of lifestyle agenda. But now you're saying that, in fact, there were tensions among that group.

MacAdams

Oh yes. But I mean, you know, the poetry community, although it was huge to me, and I think everybody in town was very, understood that this was

something, there was a lot of poets around town, and some ones that people had actually even heard of. So there was a certain element of people that weren't in the poetry world, but appreciated that there were poets like Robert Creeley living in town.

MacAdams

And generally speaking, most of the poets then were not involved in the political issues, and looked down--and just felt like they weren't--I mean, it was a combination of not feeling grounded in the community. A lot of people were really New Yorkers and just passing through on their way to San Francisco, or back to New York, whatever. So it was that, but it was--and I was the only one who really took my political stuff a long way, because the big--Joanne Kyger has emerged. She wasn't then, but she's now, she's a very political poet in her own way, in a way she wasn't at that period, at that point.

MacAdams

But I wasn't among the beginning wave--we took over the Public Utility District. We had a recall election and recalled the people that had agreed with the Corps of Engineers to sewer the mesa, and we won pretty--the Bolinas Future Studies ticket won pretty big time. I mean, I think that it was a combination of that there just had become more of us, because the people that had summer homes voted in San Francisco, generally speaking. Also, I think a number of people that were summer people also saw this as a threat, the sewerage of the mesa, as a threat to this kind of bucolic community, and I think that was an issue. I think that's what cemented--the sewerage of the mesa was really, I think, the thing that brought together the various oppositions to that.

Collings

Yes, but that was not sort of the community of poets.

MacAdams

Right. Right. See, there's, I mean if you look in this book [The Town That Fought To Save Itself] there's not any poets in this book.

Collings

Yes, that's what I was going to ask you.

MacAdams

And it was much more the community activists that were--because Orville Schell that wrote it was one of the Future Studies Center guys, although kind of at a distance, because he was too snobby to really want to get down.

Collings

So these people that are shown in the book in these photographs are like local, or are members of the local hippie community, but they're permanent residents?

MacAdams

Yes. Yes, yes. I mean, I think he lives in Austin anymore, but I mean generally speaking, that's an accurate thing to say. Patrick [Holland] just died recently.

He was actually a poet, but nobody knew of him as a poet. I mean, he didn't really take himself seriously as poet. He did, I think, later, but he wasn't at that point. He was just a natural-born rabble rouser and shit disturber. Guy could cause trouble faster than almost anybody I've ever known. But he was part of the Future Studies Center, too.

Collings

So how did you get the word out for the recall election?

MacAdams

It's a good question. I mean, the community was--I wonder if The Hearsay News had started yet. The Hearsay News is an incredible institution in Bolinas that survives to this day. It was founded by an extraordinary guy who at that point was the butcher at the Bolinas store, a guy with good writing skills and just a really amazing person. I just ran into him in Bolinas a couple of months ago. Now he has like a bookstore that you can either buy books or you can trade them, trade books, and he's happy as a clam, you know, never kind of gotten out of Bolinas, but is a really wonderful man, and a very inspiring person, Michael Rafferty.

MacAdams

He started The Hearsay News, and his concept was three days a week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, with different staffs for each day of the week, for each of the three days, and it's a form that still maintains, that I don't think The Bolinas Hearsay News had missed an edition in thirty years, and it functions as the town bulletin board. I mean, it gets out the day, you know, it comes out--I mean, I got involved. Joanne Kyger and I, and a woman named Nancy Whitefield started doing the Monday Hearsay, and it was really Nancy was the editor, and Joanne kind of roped me into it.

MacAdams

But I mean, I wrote a gossip column under the name Dorko Solingen, which was a knife firm in Solingen, Germany. See, I'd read the word somewhere and I liked it. But then I started writing--you know, what we would do is Nancy and Joanne and I would arrive at the Hearsay about nine-thirty on Monday morning, and then just wait for people to tell us stuff. And we would put--

Collings

To drop by, or call?

MacAdams

Either way. You know, we weren't checking our sources. We were just writing what people said was happening. And we would drink coffee and brandy, and smoke joints, and by one or two in the afternoon we'd have enough to fill up the paper. Then we would mimeograph it, and by five o'clock it would be all over town. It was like an edition of 400. And it still functions totally--it's amazing. The Hearsay News is one of the amazing institutions.

Collings

Was it just local news?

MacAdams

You know, it varies in what people wanted to talk about, very political, it's always left-wing. I mean, I remember Jesse Jackson when he ran for president got something like 90 percent of the vote in Bolinas.

Collings

Oh, that's great.

MacAdams

Yes, I mean, that's--you know, people are--there was a lot of politics, and now there's a radio station in West Marin that's very political. You know, it's an FM, citizens' operated, very--it ain't KCRW, but it's on the air and it really represents West Marin in a lot of ways. But The Hearsay is going strong, as far as I can see.

Collings

There was a quote in the book here about going to a discussion in Berkeley that had to do with building and energy, you know, dwellings and energy, and the quote is that, "Talk tends to be in the lifestyle vein, as though our compost piles were not connected to events in Washington and Saigon." So was this the sort of a dominant strain in Bolinas, that these lifestyle decisions had ramifications?

MacAdams

Oh yes. I mean, there were a lot of well-educated people. I mean, Peter Warshall was a Harvard grad, Orville Schell is a Harvard grad. I mean, I was a Princeton grad. Bill Niman, who went on to found Niman Ranch and Niman-Schell, the organic beef company, Bill was a schoolteacher there and was a very, very, very bright man. So I mean, there was a couple of other schoolteachers that were real involved in what we were doing, and Greg Hewlett had been a schoolteacher, and so there was always that connection.

MacAdams

And a lot of the people, you know, there was a lot of sense of people coming to the country as kind of refugees from the war, not like going to Canada, but a bit like that, you know.

Collings

Coming to the country, coming to the local, into the Bolinas area.

MacAdams

Yes, yes, and again, this was just one town in all of Northern California, but it sort of distinguished itself by being closest to the city, and because there were these issues were kind of issues that people were interested in on a wider basis. You know, there was a lot of intellectual ferment that was not just about local. You know, and there were people whose intellectual aspects, there was a guy

like, oh god, what's his name, you know, the Whole Earth Catalog? Not Stuart Brand, but well, Lloyd [Kahn], god, what's Lloyd's last name? Does it say?

Collings

It's probably somewhere in here, but who built these [unclear]?

MacAdams

Yes, who built--his first book was the Dome Book, and then got sick of domes because they leaked, because Bolinas gets like forty inches of rain, and then went on to building all kinds of structures. Lloyd Kahn, god, what am I thinking? And Lloyd was a really smart guy, and that's Peter Warshall, who was the guy I've spoken about. So the whole sort of Whole Earth Catalog world was just kind of exploding at that time, too, and although Stuart Brand didn't live in Bolinas, a lot of people that wrote for the Whole Earth Catalog, which I did, too, to some extent, not the catalog but the epilogue and some of the other offshoots of the catalog.

Collings

So it's like the town was almost like a laboratory for--

MacAdams

In some senses, yes.

Collings

--like as you were saying, future studies.

MacAdams

Yes, yes.

Collings

But on the other hand, when this book comes out it's not revealed, of course probably most people know, but it isn't revealed what the name of the town is.

MacAdams

Well, that was a big deal at the time. The whole idea was to just get Bolinas off the grid, I mean--

Collings

Which is a contradiction if you are--

MacAdams

It just made Bolinas more famous. I mean, yes, it was a complete contradiction, but everybody, it's just one of those things that no one kind of thought through.

Collings

Your future studies and your [unclear] connected to Washington and Saigon, then--

MacAdams

Yes, that's true. But people, you know, we're talking about a lot of people in their mid-twenties, that are still trying to understand where they--you know, in a completely tumultuous time. I mean I'm writing about the early seventies now in this biography of Jann, and I mean, just the madness, I mean the invasion of

Cambodia, and half or a third of the colleges in the United States shutting down for this last three months of the spring, because there was so much violence on campus.

Collings

It's amazing, yes.

MacAdams

Yes, I mean, to think back on that, I mean the Days of Rage, when all these people were going underground, and fighting, you know, bombing things, and burning down the Bank of America and just all this stuff, you know, that just now I mean it's hard to believe people--

Collings

It is tough to believe.

MacAdams

You know, but I mean Bolinas was part of all that turmoil, and all that sort of like, well, we're going to be different, you know. And it extended to like, the bar closed, then we'll go out to the Highway One, there's only one road into Bolinas, and tear down those signs saying, you know, "Bolinas, 2 miles."

Collings

Right, because they didn't want people to know where the off-ramp was.

MacAdams

Right, and it worked like a charm. And state, Caltrans replaced the signs for a while, increasingly powerful signs, you know, in concrete with metal. They started out as wood, and you know, people just yanked them down and would put them on top of the Bolinas Community Center for people to see the next morning, you know. And so not saying Bolinas was like, you know, that's what you did in those days, you didn't mention it. It's funny, when I was writing this review of Joanne's and Philip Whalen's book, I found myself hesitating. Should I mention Bolinas, or should I--you know, even now. I think I did actually mention it, but it's still like I think twice, you know, is this going to be good for Bolinas?

MacAdams

And you know, I think people kind of overestimated the importance of this in a way, but I mean, it was a sincere thing. So I wasn't among the first--people came out of Future Studies to be elected. Peter was, Orville was, this guy Bill Niman was, a woman named Mimi Harris was, who was a schoolteacher, and I can't think right now who was the fifth; oh, Bill Niman, did I say Bill? I can't remember if there's another one.

MacAdams

But then Peter quit, and then I stepped in and became a commissioner, and I discovered fairly quickly that I really wasn't--I didn't really want to do this. I mean, I was excited by it. I remember one of the things my mom--my father

hated Bolinas, and I remember him saying one time when he came to see my son, Ocean, you know, "Don't take me down any more dirt roads." He just hated what--I hadn't gone to college, and he'd put me through Princeton and you know.

Collings

I can understand, yes.

MacAdams

Yes, yes, you know now I can. I mean, then I was like--or even then I understood it a little bit, but really, our relationship was real poisoned the last ten years of his life, and his whole business world fell apart, you know, and he was angry at the world, and a lot of it was aimed in my direction. But my mom was a little more tolerant, and a little more--

Collings

She understood more about what was going on at the time.

MacAdams

Yes, yes, and she and I were quite close, and my dad and I were not as close. But so one time she came out to Bolinas to see our kid, to see Ocean, and she came to a Bolinas Public Utility District meeting when I was on the board, and I remember she was so bored. I looked back in the room and she was like reading the San Francisco Chronicle kind of surreptitiously, trying to be interested in what her son was doing, but in reality--and it was funny. I mean, that was a really kind of a pivotal moment, was I was like--

Collings

What was boring about the meetings? I mean you have all these wonderful, colorful characters.

MacAdams

Yes. They didn't seem boring to me at all, you know, but it was just like a lot of it was all like sewer pipes and you know. I mean we used it as a governing body, and it functioned that way in a lot of ways, in a lot of really creative, interesting ways, but it was also, you know, it was like, did somebody pay their bill on time? You know, it's like, does the backhoe need fixing? It's just a small town. You know, it had like two employees and five bosses, so it was insane on a certain level.

Collings

Well, did you find that you had to--I mean, was it a situation where you found that you had to kind of reinvent rules and structure as this went along?

MacAdams

Yes.

Collings

Like, okay, somebody didn't pay their bill on time. Do you cut them off? I mean, what do you do in that situation?

MacAdams

Yes, exactly. I mean, to me it was very creative, but at the same time--it's hard to remember exactly about this, but at that point a lawyer named Paul Kayfetz had been elected to the board at the same time. I was appointed to take over Peter Warshall's space, and then I ran for election and was elected, and Paul was elected at the same time. And Paul was an ambulance-chasing lawyer, but he was a smart guy. Well, he did most of his stuff--he had a weird specialty. He would recreate accident scenes, and it was apparently a very lucrative thing, and he had a big house in Bolinas. He was very different.

Collings

Was it like Cindy Sherman?

MacAdams

Yes, something like--it's weird, it is, yes, something like Cindy Sherman. I mean big, you know, he'd recreate train wrecks and stuff, and so there was some money that he was making some serious money. But he went on to--when we put on a--one of the most significant things, probably the most significant thing we did was to--

Collings

Let me take this cord away from you. It's going to go [makes sound].

MacAdams

Okay, yes, okay, good point. Was we installed, or we put in a water-meter moratorium, that there would be no--Bolinas didn't have much water storage, I mean amazingly little water storage, and we had gotten to a situation as the town had grown some--it didn't have to grow much for this to be the situation, but where we had a choice, really, of voting to bond ourselves to build a bigger water-storage facility, or somehow hook in with the Marin Water District, which is a sort of smaller equivalent of the Metropolitan Water District, or--so we could either expand the capacity, which would allow more people to come to live in Bolinas, or we could not do that, and declare a moratorium on water meters.

MacAdams

It wasn't a very difficult decision, because we knew what we were trying to accomplish, and it was obvious, but it set off a legal battle that lasted for ten years, backed by the Pacific Legal Foundation, which was James Watts' foundation out of Denver, and they came after Bolinas. And Paul Kayfetz, who's this lawyer on the board, basically singlehandedly fought off this--it cost Bolinas, I mean, I don't think Paul charged for his time, but it was still something that cost the community like a million dollars over the years.

Collings

So you're talking about a moratorium on meters on individual homes?

MacAdams

Yes, you couldn't--you know, you had to have a water meter to have water, and if you didn't get a water meter you couldn't have water. So some people that didn't have water meters were understandably pissed, but you know, it allowed us to really plan then for the community. I mean, we did things like you couldn't build in swales, and there's a lot of swales in Bolinas, and that's something that's held to this day, and it's one of the things that makes Bolinas so attractive, is there's all these watercourses, you know, little valleys and rivulet areas and wetland areas, all moving through the community.

MacAdams

You know, so but Paul and I, even though he went on to become a crucial central figure in Bolinas, he and I didn't get along. We sat at opposite ends of the table, and we would just battle over everything, and I began to see--and my marriage by this time had split, fallen apart, and I had then fallen in love with a dancer from Merce Cunningham's company, and she came to Bolinas and I was like, you know, when I think of myself at that time, I was so selfish, so emotionally selfish about things, but you know, I'm just immediately like, "Okay, here's my new life," you know.

MacAdams

So I decided--and Phoebe was hospitalized, and we had two little kids. I mean, we had Ocean, who was then about two, and Will, who was then about six months old, and I couldn't--she wasn't capable of taking care of the kids at all. Our marriage was shattered. So I sent Will to my parents in Dallas, and kept Ocean myself, you know, which was doable, because he was two at least. And then Barbara and I, Barbara Dilly and I got together, and I decided to move to New York, so then I took Ocean to my parents house in Dallas and laid Ocean on my parents. Again, you know, it's just, it's amazing to me to retell these things and sort of just think about who I am and who I was.

Collings

Well, they were probably very happy to see the grandchildren.

MacAdams

They were, actually. I mean they never complained, and I think that they were. I think that it was a year and a half or two years that they had my kids was really, it was great for them. But I think they probably would have preferred to have been asked, rather than--and I'm sure they would have said yes. But anyway, so I ran off to New York with Barbara after depositing Ocean with my parents, and Will was there, and immediately got hepatitis, along with a couple of other friends from Bolinas. I mean, you know, it wasn't hep C [hepatitis C] I don't think. No, it wasn't, because I've been tested over the years, but I was quite ill.

MacAdams

And I ended up--and Barbara and I immediately saw that that wasn't quite the tour that we had signed up for, was her nursing me through hepatitis. Barbara was a few years older and kind of a much more together person than me.

Collings

Yes. Well, and she had a busy schedule as a dancer.

MacAdams

Yes, yes, yes. Well, she had left, she had left Merce Cunningham the year before we met, and she became part of a really interesting company called Grand Union, which was an improvisational company with--it included some great dancers of the time, Doug Dunn, Steve Paxton, oh, shit, I can't remember who all, but really a lot of Cunningham alumnus who were looking for a less-structured form. And that's where I came into Barbara's life, and vice versa. She was a really beautiful woman, really just really sensual, really great person. I see her every once in a while. She's in Naropa, part of the Naropa community.

MacAdams

So then I had hepatitis, then suddenly I'm back in my parents' house in my old high-school bed, except now my parents are taking care of me, as well as my kids.

Collings

Wow. That's quite a switch from the Future Studies in Bolinas.

MacAdams

Yes, yes. Well, you know, it was just, I mean hepatitis was a kind of turning point, because I remember my mother sitting on the edge of my bed and saying, "You've got to figure out a way to get a job." You know, I mean I'd basically been living off of air, you know, and off of money of Phoebe's, and we'd done this long trip together, and we'd been in Bolinas together, and I'm sick in the bed, but it really was like the end of our marriage, you know. Even though, in fact, we reconnected and got back together two or three more times in what was the next several years, and causing another round of incredible emotional damage on other people.

MacAdams

So I remember looking out the window in my bedroom and seeing my father teaching Ocean to ride a bike, you know, instead of me, and just like, what is going on here? So it just happened--what?

Collings

--teaching to ride a bike on a dirt road, right?

MacAdams

No, this was in Dallas, right, right. So I, as fortune had it, the woman who was running the Poetry Center at San Francisco State [University] at that point was a woman named Kathleen Fraser, and Kathleen is quite a good poet, and we had been lovers briefly during all this turmoil, so we had a kind of a close

relationship. And she asked me if I--there was like a three-year appointment, that's the way it worked at the Poetry Center in those days, and her three years was up, and she was, had gotten herself on tenure track and was going to become a professor, and she asked me if I wanted to run the Poetry Center.

Collings

That was fortuitous.

MacAdams

Yes, it was totally fortuitous, and I said, absolutely. So I had to go out to San Francisco. I was getting over hepatitis, and I'd had a job, I had gotten a job. I was a DJ in a discotheque in Dallas on the LBJ Freeway when it just finished, and there was very little there, and it was just like the most white-bread suburban people, and I was like sitting up in a clear plastic booth, still so weak I had to be leaning against a stool in order to really do my shift. I did the afternoon shift. I wasn't capable, I wasn't musically capable or physically capable of doing the night shifts at that point. But it got me enough money to get--then I found a drive-away bread truck, a panel truck, one of those big old panel trucks, which was quite ironic, because my father was always saying, "Well, if you give up this poetry stuff you can always come back to Dallas and drive a bread truck for a living, because he was in the baking industry.

MacAdams

And it became almost a joke, but not quite. So here I am driving a bread truck west to California again, and that was a great trip, because I stopped in Amarillo and saw Robert Smithson's Amarillo Ramp, and met Stanley Marsh III, who was this eccentric oil-and-gas--

Collings

The Cadillac--

MacAdams

Yes, he had that Cadillac Ranch, too. And that became, that was really--I'd been aware of Smithson, I'd been very aware of Smithson, actually, by that point.

Collings

He's the relationship between Smithson and the L.A. River.

MacAdams

Oh yes, yes, no, it's a huge influence at that time, on me at that point, and remains still, really. But now it's much more I'm much more influenced by Joseph Beuys, that kind of had a much more political mind. But in terms of art, earth as art, it was Smithson all the way. I had--I can't remember which trip this was, but somehow after I'd been with Barbara, I somehow connected up with some people on Greene Street when SoHo was just getting started, and met--Smithson had just died, and I had met his widow, and I really thought I should write a biography of Smithson. And she was totally into it, but then Richard

Serra, who ran, was in charge of Smithson's estate, nixed me because I didn't have any art-world creds [credentials], which really, I think, was a huge mistake on his part, because there's still never been a proper biography of Smithson, not that I would have been necessarily capable of writing it, but I certainly wanted to.

MacAdams

So I was really aware of his work, and then after I had hepatitis, there's some New York interlude that I'm not sort of remembering correctly, but it's somewhere in there, before I went to see Stanley Marsh and saw the Amarillo Ramp, I'd been staying in SoHo and was in Smithson's work. Even though he had just died, he was very present in people's minds. It was when SoHo was really just getting started, when places like Greene Street was all filled with artists in these amazing lofts.

MacAdams

So I got back to California, got the job in San Francisco State. Phoebe was in Colorado. I had made a decision early on at San Francisco State that I was going to--there were kind of two ways to run the Poetry Center. One way was, you kind of did it in a conservative way, and you pleased the Creative Writing Department, or you did it balls to the wall and did something incredible, which, of course, is what I chose. So I never really got on the tenure track, and I made some real enemies. I mean when I put on Rod McKuen, for instance, it was like a faux poet that was very present in San Francisco. That earned me the permanent enmity of a few people.

MacAdams

But there was a lot of events. You know, I've looked at poetry in the broader community, and the Poetry Center is the staging area for that. And also, I was becoming very interested in what was becoming, was performance. I didn't really know about performance art, but the first gig I put on was by a poet named Jessica Hagedorn, who's gone on to be a pretty well-known playwright. And Jessica had a band in those days called the West Coast Gangster Choir. The first gig I put on was a regular poet named Michael Brownstein, who's actually a quite interesting writer, and Jessica and the West Coast Gangster Choir. And while Michael was reading, one of Jessica's musicians stepped out in the hall to have a cigarette, and it was like the auditorium within like the Music Building, and apparently somebody of his description, i.e. black, had been thought--somebody was suspicious, or some people were accused--some instruments had been stolen. So this guy was apprehended by the campus police, who immediately ran and found that he had a bunch of overdue parking tickets, and took him to jail.

MacAdams

So the first gig at San Francisco State, everybody--there's a march on the dean's office to demand that this guy be released from jail. So I was off to like, it was-

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Collings

A flying start.

MacAdams

Yes, a flying start. And it was like that for the three years. I mean, I did a lot of huge events, I mean, thousands of people events, with Gary Snyder and Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

Collings

But with those kinds of names, I mean the university must have been [unclear].

MacAdams

Oh yes, you know, I mean some people thought I was the best director the Poetry Center ever had, which I think--although the guy that's there now has been there for a long time--they've abandoned the three-year thing--has really, really done a great job, but until he came along, I think I was, personally I thought I was the best director since Ruth Witt-Diamant, who was the founder of the Poetry Center. I mean I brought in a wide range. I was the one who brought in first-time Puerto Rican American, NewYorRican poets, and many people that have gone on to be really great writers had their first public--Joan Didion did her first public reading for me at the San Francisco, at the Poetry Center. You know, there's a lot, a lot, a lot. You know, we put on twenty, thirty events a year, a school year, and we didn't just do them on campus. We did them all over the city in all these big auditoriums.

Collings

So was it in any way similar to the environment at University of Buffalo, do you think?

MacAdams

Well, State--I mean, I guess you could see it that way, but I mean State is so particular, you know. The politics by that time, there was more organized ethnic politics than there had been in Buffalo. You know, the Mexican-Americans were getting angry, and the black Americans were getting angry. This was still wartime. Well, no, the war had just ended, but there was all that early seventies, all that--

Collings

[unclear] the market.

MacAdams

Yes, there was much more--the politics was much more sophisticated, and San Francisco State much more committed, left-wing. You know, I mean San Francisco State has had a tradition of being a politically motivated place since, I don't know, I mean certainly since the fifties, and all kinds of life, you know,

left-wing and gay rights and sexual freedom. People were really into politics at State, so it was more than just kind of cultural, because a lot of people, you know, I mean State is a city campus, and really drew a city world.

MacAdams

And Buffalo, there was a city aspect, but I mean there were lots of kids there that were not from Buffalo. And State tended to be people from San Francisco. But I was still living in Bolinas. I didn't even have a car at that point. I was hitchhiking back and forth, and was sleeping on the couch of the Poetry Center, you know, and just mad love affairs, and just craziness, and really, I mean, making almost no money, and spending day and night. I was going to see every poetry reading in San Francisco, and really learning, really learning a lot as a poet from just watching what other people did.

MacAdams

And it got me more and more interested in performance as poetry. And I was running--I remember, just suddenly flashed on one of the poets I brought to San Francisco State was this great poet whose work I love, named Simon Ortiz, who's an Acoma Pueblo guy, and who's probably, if it weren't for alcoholism, there would be no doubt that he would be the great American-Indian poet. And he is, actually, but he's sort of, he blew it too many times.

MacAdams

I went all the way--my then-girlfriend and I drove all the way to Acoma in New Mexico, northern New Mexico, to invite him to come read at San Francisco State. And he was like, "You drove a thousand miles just to ask me this?" And yes, I was just that kind of a person, you know, and it was a theatrical gesture, and she and I got to hang out together for a few days, so it was all those things. But then finally he shows up to do his gig, and it's like the day before, and suddenly he and I are hitchhiking to Bolinas. And he was like--he wrote a poem about it, it's like, what, who is this guy? You know, he's like hitchhiking to Bolinas.

MacAdams

And that's when I started living in Bill Niman's hog barn, and that's when I wrote News From Niman Farm, that was a long poem about that time, and Bill was just beginning with his then-wife Amy, who was very soon there after the poem News From Niman Farm was published, was killed. She was a horsewoman, and she was killed breaking a horse. It just threw her. You know, she was very skilled, and it was one of those things, you know. That was all happening in the mid-seventies, all when I was running the Poetry Center.

MacAdams

But I was just clinging by my fingers to the edge of the continent. I mean, my life was just in utter chaos, even though it was better than it had been. At least I had a job, so to speak. But as the seventies went along, Phoebe came back. She

and I tried it again, didn't work, and then I was really kind of broken at that time, because it also had meant the end of a relationship I'd had with somebody else, who was like, she couldn't believe that I had gone back to my wife after a couple of years. I mean, again, it's one of those things I still, you know, I wish I had acted differently, but I didn't. And she was much more of a country woman. She was a real country woman. She was a country-hippie person. And then our lives were just going--

Collings

From Bolinas?

MacAdams

She had been part of Morningstar [commune], which was another big commune. She had been married to the guy whose money had made Morningstar, and they split up. She was an amazing person, great woman, but really not interested in city life at all, and Bolinas was as city as she was ever to get. Now I think she lives up in the Sierras somewhere. And I could see where, you know, we just couldn't make it. I mean, I was--and I had other girlfriends in the city. I mean, it was just a lot of chaos in my life.

MacAdams

And when Phoebe came back, and then we couldn't make it again, I just, I moved into the city for a while. I was part of a share of a really great flat in North Beach that had been passed from poet to poet, and was like \$300 a month, and it was just a won--I had that, I shared it with some other poets. And I started to be aware of this club called the Mabuhay Gardens, which was a punk-rock, the first big punk-rock club in San Francisco, and I would go and hang out there, because that was just three or four blocks from where I lived, and I was really starting to be curious about all these bands that were coming up, you know, and saw a lot of them, I mean the Dead Kennedys and the Dead Boys from Cleveland, and just different bands. Everybody played there then, in these early days, the sort of CBGB days in New York, but it was the Mabuhay Gardens, the Fab Mab in San Francisco.

MacAdams

The Mabuhay had been a Filipino supper club, and they moved the supper club upstairs, and you couldn't crank it up while the supper club was still open, so you couldn't really crank it up till like ten o'clock at night, and the guy that booked the club, Dirk Dirksen, wanted to do something. He was looking for things to do earlier that could draw some people in, and so I suggested we do these poetry events. We called them Move Poetry, and it was the beginning of Jim Carroll singing and doing the Jim Carroll Band, who went on to actually have one hit, this great song called "People Who Died." Jim started singing there. Bill Talen, who became the Reverend Billy and just had a movie, "What Would Jesus Buy?" Bill started performances there.

MacAdams

And I started doing things where I would stand up in front of an audience and just start making it up, you know. I'd gotten really sick of reading. It just seemed like a shtick, because not only was I giving, seeing readings by the thousands, but I was out on the road as much as I could be, giving readings. And those were the days when the National Endowment for the Arts really had a presence, and every little town that had a college town that had a bookstore could get a grant from the NEA, and pay you a couple of hundred dollars, and you could make a little money moving around, and that's one of the ways I made my living, that and digging ditches, and [unclear] Bolinas Public Utility District. That was before I got elected to run it.

MacAdams

You know, and at one point I was a barker at a topless joint in San Francisco, when my first wife was a dancer there, and there was a lot of amphetamine in North Beach and me at that time. But when the Mabuhay Gardens things started, I really started to be interested in performance, and I was really beginning to move away from Bolinas. I mean, I still had my residence there, and I came back to Bolinas again after it sort of settled down with Phoebe, and I got another place to live, so Bolinas was still my home, even though I had this little share in San Francisco.

MacAdams

But I really started to feel that I was moving somewhere else. Then I met Wim Wenders, and Wim was at the time--[Francis Ford] Coppola had just brought him to San Francisco, and he was shooting, he was doing this movie, "Hammett." He'd done "The American Friend," which remains one of my favorite movies of all time, and I got to know Wim a little bit, and I began to feel like, well, maybe--when Phoebe and I broke up and I was in San Francisco, I was going to a lot of movies. I mean, it was just kind of the way I was drowning myself, and I'd taken film courses in college, film-history courses. I mean, that was the days of Stan Brakhage, and you know, at Princeton we had a little film society, like most schools did at that point, and the avant-garde filmmakers were always consciously present, and [Andy] Warhol's films had happened.

Collings

Had you seen any of those films when you went into New York City?

MacAdams

I hung out around the Warhol scene a lot. I didn't even talk about that part of it, but I knew that--there's a little bit about that in the book, *Birth of the Cool*. There's a section about Warhol and me. I was a fly on the wallpaper there. Gerard Malanga, who was a poet, was also a photographer, and was one of the intimates, and he did a lot of the original flower silkscreens for Warhol. Gerard

and I remain very good friends, and a couple of other people, a woman named Bridget Polk, who was a speed freak in those days, who was the heiress to, I guess, some of the, was it the Hearst fortune? But one magazine fortune or another, and was a very, in those days a rather degenerate but charming and jolly person, and who shot speed from morning till night, and from night till morning.

MacAdams

So that got me in to, you know, around the original Factory. I was there many times, Max's Kansas City backroom, and I was just digging it. I wasn't--I had no business particularly there, but I knew it was amazing, and I just wanted to, you know, be there. So that was going on. But I didn't really think in terms of--I mean, I thought of Warhol in terms of, I mean I saw all the movies, and Chelsea Girls is another one of my all-time favorites, but I certainly did not see any part there for me, although, in fact, I was in one of Warhol's movies, was a movie called Women in Revolt. It was like these drag queens that steal all the money from their feminist group. But I've never actually seen that one, but I was actually in it, but I don't know if they cut me out or not, because I started to give a speech in the middle of it, and Warhol was like, "What are you--?" And you know, I just thought, hey, it's improvisation.

MacAdams

So I had become aware of this--L.A. started to enter my life a little bit through Wenders, even though he was living in San Francisco. I began to think about movies, and think, well, maybe that's my next step, write movies. I'll go to Hollywood and write movies. And I was about thirty-five, thirty-four, thirty-five by that time. Yes, I guess I was, and should have had settled down to some extent by then. But really, there was no place left for me in Bolinas. I mean, there wasn't a dirt road I'd walk down that there wasn't a ghost.

Collings

Did you feel like some of the sort of the cultural work of the town had peaked perhaps?

MacAdams

Perhaps. You know, that could have been it, but I think, you know, it certainly had for me. I wasn't on the Public Utility District anymore. The Poetry Center ended for me in 1978. The relationships were all playing out, and you know, just I didn't know what to do really. I didn't have a home, you know, really. I was just renting places. My friends were all buying places. My marriage was over, and another important relationship was over. Then so meeting Wim and sort of being around him and seeing that you could be an artist--I never sort of occurred to me. I mean, I knew you could make art films like Warhol did, or Stan Brakhage, or Bruce Kahn or people like that, but I knew I wasn't a

filmmaker per se, but when I saw what Wim was doing as an artist, I started to think, well, maybe I could do that, or something like that.

MacAdams

And then at that same time, this magazine called Wet magazine existed in L.A., and the guy that owned the magazine, Leonard Koren, somehow ended up in Bolinas for a visit. He went to the bookstore, which was owned by eleven women, and I at that point was living just around the corner in what's downtown Bolinas. So he asked if there were any writers around that he should meet, and so they said, "Oh, you should just go around the corner. Lewis MacAdams is probably doing nothing," which I'm sure I was. And I met him and he showed me some copies of Wet magazine, and I thought, damn, you know, this is really something. It was the first magazine that sort of looked at Japanese popular culture. It really was a magazine about L.A. culture, and the first magazine that I'd ever seen or heard of that--because to me L.A. at that point was still like parodied in Herb Caen's column in the San Francisco Chronicle, people just wearing white shoes.

MacAdams

So this was another aspect, you know, that, oh, there was like people that were hip in L.A. It just had never occurred to me. And this whole performance thing was somehow, that was becoming more and more--I was just seeing that as the way that I was going to go, that I was going. So it was a combination of all of these things that in 1980 or the end of, very end of 1979 I headed south.

MacAdams

Maybe that's a good place to stop for today, just getting to L.A., because all this stuff does actually tie into the next--

Collings

I do want to ask you--I was just going to say, what in particular--you talked about discovering Robert Smithson. What was that really about for you?

MacAdams

Interesting. It was about--I'm trying to remember how I even first ran across him. It had to have been in SoHo in that period, because he was such a presence. I never met him, but he was definitely, his work was already--I mean, those guys were just rising. It was when Phillip Glass was playing for twenty people in a loft, and when Richard Serra was really making his statements, and you know, many, many other artists. I mean, SoHo was incredibly vital at that time. And you know, I'd been interested in art, I mean, from the time I was in my--when I got to college really, I started to really think about it, because a lot of poets, a lot of my friends sort of made part of their living sort of doing art reviews for ArtNews and places like that, especially ArtNews, but other places, too.

MacAdams

And there really had been a tradition of artists and poets for quite a long time, especially, you know, since France in the end of the nineteenth, early twentieth century, where poets were supportive of artists, and were very aware of the new movements and stuff like that. And some of the poets that I really liked, Ted Berrigan wrote reviews for ArtNews, and poets that I loved, like Frank O'Hara, who was a curator, had risen from being a postcard salesman to a curator at Museum of Modern Art. John Ashbery was already becoming well known as an art critic. I think he was still living in France at that period, in Paris.

MacAdams

But it was--and Peter Schjeldahl, who went on to become a really important art critic. He and I edited a magazine. We edited--he'd started a magazine called Mother magazine, and in my early twenties I came on as kind of his sort of a second person in helping him with the magazine. That's how I met a lot of poets, and I met a lot of poets at Princeton because I would bring poets down to Princeton to read, so that was a real--and some of them. I mean, one of the most amazing readings I ever put on was Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, Ted Berrigan, Joe Brainard, Amiri Baraka, who was still Leroi Jones, and I forget, others. Oh, the sixth poet was Tony Towle, who was also another art-critic poet, and we had, only four people showed up for that one. Yes, I know, it's amazing. It was typical of the kind of events, when I did it in Princeton.

Collings

So were you able to bring them down and the university would pay them?

MacAdams

No. At that particular reading, nobody got anything.

Collings

Wow.

MacAdams

I remember just being so embarrassed, and they were all six of them in one car, and I was reaching in to shake hands and thank them, and somebody yelled, "Get his watch." That was the kind of level that it was. So there was always all these poetry-art connections to me, and I was just paying attention to art, and then this is what had begun to happen, this sort of--you know, I'd been really, dug Warhol and all the pop artists, and this was kind of the next, the reaction to it, and the next phase was really when SoHo started to happen.

MacAdams

So I don't remember exactly when I got [unclear], but it was clearly around that time. It wasn't like I sort of saw it as like from a political point of view yet, but it certainly became that, and it just seemed like the logical progression, earth art. You know, I understood it was something about--I mean, there were other people, Michael Heizer was another guy, and there was a bunch of people who were doing work on that grand scale. I guess the scale may have had something

to do with it. But I just really intuitively understood Smithson's work, and really did begin to see--I don't know if I saw it so much in Bolinas, but I might have.

MacAdams

I might not have been conscious of seeing it, but certainly when I got to L.A. it became one of, probably the single most-important influence on the founding of Friends of the Los Angeles River, because by that time I was really starting to understand that there was this kind of way of making art that it's really taken me a long time to articulate, and Joseph Beuys is very important in terms of what I do, and continues to be, and has a lot of relevance to the whole Friends of Los Angeles River thing. I mean, but it's definitely Smithson and Beuys were the influences that led to the creation of Friends of Los Angeles River. Are there any other questions on that area?

Collings

No, I mean, with you poetry and politics have always had kind of a lifestyle component. There was never any question for you of some sort of T.S. Eliot type of existence?

MacAdams

Well, there was a whole intellectual--yes, I don't know why. You know, I wish there was. I mean, I would have probably been a happier person and a more settled person. I was just really oblivious to things, you know. I mean, it was funny, I was just thinking about this yesterday, Phoebe and I having an argument in Bolinas, and her just--it was before she flipped out, and before the first time we broke up, and her--you know, we didn't have a great sex life, to put it mildly. I mean, she was flipping out, and I was just, I don't know, we weren't really connecting that way. We were so young, and just really, and so innocent. And I remember her one day just like exasperatedly, angrily saying, "Money is real, sex is real." And me like trying to finesse it somewhere in my mind.

MacAdams

You know, and there were a lot of things like that. But I mean, it wasn't cool to be an Eliot person, because William Carlos Williams felt that Eliot was deleterious to American poetry, because he'd picked up all these English aspects, and you know, we were all Williams people, all my gang, you the people and poets that I loved, and Eliot was like literally looked down on at that point. And, in fact, I mean, I think Eliot is a really great poet, but I really didn't come to understand how great a poet he was until many, many years later. So there was, like, you know, the Robert Haas school, I'm sure, thought Eliot was a great poet. I mean, I don't really know, because that was like a different world.

Collings

Well, I meant more like having a sort of conventional life, and writing your poetry, and that was not on the table.

MacAdams

It just wasn't what my mentors and models were about. It wasn't what Gary did, and it wasn't what Alan did, and it wasn't--you know, Frank O'Hara had a regular job, I guess, at Museum of Modern Art, but it never--I mean running the Poetry Center was probably the longest, it is the longest I ever had a job, and that was a part-time job that I made into a more than fulltime job, because I was passionate about it. I don't know, you know. It's like it's still--I mean this grant I have is going to run out in a couple of months, and I don't know how I'm going to keep this place, you know.

Collings

Well, changing society always seems, it seems like it was always part of--

MacAdams

Yes. Well, I grew up and I think I mentioned, my parents were somewhat political, and I grew up, and they were the only liberal Democrats in the precinct, so I mean, I was aware of being a small minority and of being political from the time I was a kid, so that was always--I was always interested in politics, and I became interested in poetry by the time I was fifteen or sixteen. And you know, I wasn't conscious of the contradictions really until Bolinas. Is that true? I'm not sure about that. But I think it wasn't really till Bolinas that I started being able to start to define, you know, what were my problems, or what were the issues that I needed to grapple with, and, of course, I would choose the one, the issue that was the most abstract, which was like poetry versus politics rather than making a living, or settling down, or keeping a family together and all that. And I don't know why. I don't know why I was so oblivious to so many things.

Collings

Well, the times.

MacAdams

That was part of it. You know, I see my seventeen-year-old who lives with me, and I just, it infuriates me on an hourly basis how oblivious he is to everything, even though he's like incredibly aware of politics and hip-hop culture and sports and stuff like that. But I mean, he just doesn't have any idea how to live. He doesn't have a clue. And I was probably exactly the same, except you know, there was a little more fat on the land, you know, at the time. I mean, it was a wildly tumultuous time, but it was also a time when America's way was really cresting, you know, when you could buy a house on welfare, you know, and anybody could be on welfare.

MacAdams

So I was able to get by in Bolinas in a country sort of way. So I wasn't--I remember becoming in Bolinas, because of Ted Berrigan and Tom becoming very interested in poets and politics for the first time. It hadn't really occurred to me, even though I was paying close attention to people like Alan Ginsberg, but I mean, you know, not really understanding that Alan was gay, Alan didn't have to think about certain things, and he was also vastly more talented than me, and lived an incredibly public life in a way that I always was kind of, sort of public life in a way, and was drawn to it, and in a sense I still am. But I wasn't conscious of it.

MacAdams

But I remember I started reading Byron carefully, and Shelley, and people like that, and trying to understand their politics and how they proceeded as a poet, and as a figure. I mean, Byron was very much a political figure. Shelley wrote poems that were highly political, and Marvel was very much--I mean, you know, those were the days when Sir Walter Raleigh and people like that, that were great poets and great warriors and great political hustlers, so I started to really understand. But I didn't really understand my, who I was at all. I mean, that definitely didn't happen until the L.A. River.

MacAdams

But by the seventies, late, especially the latter half of the seventies, I had really become aware of that it was an important issue for me, that I had to figure out something in terms of who I was.

Collings

And you needed to bring all of these threads together, which it seems to be like poetry and art, civic participation of some kind, political, you know, politicized social engineering.

MacAdams

Yes, yes, interesting. It's a term that I'm using a lot now, because it's a term I learned in Smithson, I mean in Beuys, it's called social sculpture. It's how you sculpt the society, and that's totally what my work is about. I mean, until a few months ago I was with a woman for a couple of years named Lauren Bon, and Lauren is an artist, and she and I really share an interest in Beuys, and she and I would really kind of drive each other forward into our understanding of Beuys's work. I've come to see that that's the touchstone for me, at this point anyway, so my understanding deepens of his work. It becomes more clearly--we'll talk about that next time, because it does become a real important aspect.

MacAdams

Yes, I'm sorry, this seems awfully long-winded. [End of interview]

1.3. Session 3 (January 31, 2008)

Collings

Okay, Jane Collings interviewing Lewis MacAdams, January 31st, 2008, in his home.

MacAdams

So we were talking about the first time I saw the river, and that sense of some kind of knowledge, you know, some sense of like knowing that I was going to be involved. I mean, I can remember sort of the feel. It was like the end of a day. It was in wintertime, so I'd finished working on this job for very little money and was just kind of walking from--you know, I'm not sure which bridge I saw. It was probably the First Street Bridge, because I down in the Arts District, you know, when it was still just starting to become the Arts District. You know, and I saw it, and I just, because of all my experience with rivers, I just--and I had never thought about the L.A. River, or even really knew it existed, particularly. I never knew anything about L.A. I'd just come to here for really one of the first times. I think I'd been here twice maybe before in my life. But it was just this knowledge that my life and this river were going to be intertwined from then on.

Collings

What time of year was this?

MacAdams

It was probably--it was in the winter, because it was already dark, I know, when I was going to the bus stop. And I don't remember even looking at, seeing the river so much as the channel itself, and in those days, because the [Donald C.] Tillman Water Reclamation Plant hadn't come online, there was very little water in the river. Now, I mean, most of the river, there's water all year round, except during the rainy season it's mostly reclaimed sewage. So at that time you could actually just kind of walk. There would be water in this little invert in the middle, but basically you could just walk up and downstream, except during the rainy season.

MacAdams

So, you know, I don't think I ever wrote the article for this newspaper about the river, but I did do this performance. I can't remember; did I talk about this before?

Collings

No, you didn't. No.

MacAdams

You know, it was several pieces of it. I did it with a guy named Pat Patterson, and with a guy named Roger Wong. Roger had a little art gallery called the Los Angeles Museum of Art. This was a storefront on Beverly near Vermont, just west of Vermont. Pat was a sculptor, and not terribly successful, and a guy that

went on to move to New York and become very, very, very successful in terms of building lofts and building restaurants and things like that.

Collings

Interesting.

MacAdams

So he used his sculpturism in another way. But he was a very close friend of mine at the time. The woman he lived with at the time was one of the owners and editors of Wet magazine, a woman named Elizabeth Freeman. So the actual performance was in two or three different pieces. Part of it was we did a walk in the L.A. River, and we did it with a bunch of artists, because that's basically the only people I knew.

MacAdams

I think I was already working at that time for Linda Burnham, who edited a magazine, a performance art magazine called High Performance, which was kind of the Bible or the New Testament of the performance world, which was more or less centered in L.A., anyway. Its offices were on Broadway just a little north of here. So we got a bunch of people--no, actually, no, this was later; this was later. This was a few months later.

MacAdams

So the performance itself consisted of me, Pat, and Roger--

Collings

Roger Wong.

MacAdams

--Wong, yes, W-o-n-g, going to the river and just--we didn't really know where we were going. I borrowed a pair of wire cutters from a guy named Greg Gannon, and so we cut a hole in the fence and declared the river open, and then we just started--you know. It was very steep. It was right behind--some of the first loft conversions downtown were on First Street, just right by the First Street Bridge, and that was before the MTA [Metropolitan Transit Authority], so there was a lot of kind of empty land that was kind of--some of the tracks were still there, but it wasn't active very much the way it is now, with all the Red Car Line stuff.

Collings

Right.

MacAdams

So we just walked down to the river, and there the embankment is quite steep. We climbed down, and we just walked upstream, just because we didn't walk downstream; there wasn't any real reason. But we got to this place where what's now, I realize, is the Arroyo Seco confluence that comes down, or the Hahamongna, as it was called before the white people got here. And it was just this scene of human wreckage. I mean, there were people living in this channel.

The Arroyo Seco goes through sort of a tunnel to come out to the river. People were living there, and there were junk cars.

MacAdams

At that time they were repaving part of the river, because, I mean, basically, concrete is just inverted riverbed, you know. So there were all these paving machines, these jackhammers, and all these guys working. There was like these big airport-like runway paving machines. So, you know, we asked to speak for the river, asked the river if we could speak for it in human realm, and didn't hear it say no, so that was part of it.

MacAdams

Then the other part of it was actually a performance at a place, that theater called the Wallenboyd Theater, which is at the corner of Wall and Boyd Streets, which then it was just like a total, total slum. There was an abandoned gas station across the street, which was filled with people living there. It's Toy Town now, but this is before that whole Chinese, southern Chinese, Korean import Toy World existed. So it was really kind of a very desolate place, and there was this little theater that, it was working with the Museum of Contemporary Art on this series called Angel's Flight, and they asked me to do a performance.

MacAdams

So the performance consisted of several things. Me, I was wearing--I found a white suit, and I painted myself green, and Willy became William Mulholland, telling the story of my involvement as William Mulholland with the river, which was extensive. I mean, he lived by the L.A. River for years. I don't know if you know where the Mulholland Fountain is over on Los Feliz and Riverside Drive, but that was the site of where--

Collings

Oh. Oh yes, of course, I know where that is. Yes.

MacAdams

Yes, he lived right there, and he planted thousands of trees around the river. He was very intimately involved with the river, and it was a story of the tragedy of the San Francisquito Dam, of his own ego and his insistence on building this dam where they shouldn't have, and then it collapsed as soon as it opened and was filled, as soon as it was filled. It killed hundreds of people and destroyed his career. So I told that story, and then while that was happening, Pat was building a giant totem out of detritus from the river on stage behind me. Then I just kind of went into this sort of--it sort of became like a totem pole, and I became like all these different creatures, from hawks down to rattlesnakes, on the stage. And everybody hated it.

Collings

Now, why was that?

MacAdams

Well, you know, I think that it was really because we'd really hijacked the theater for this kind of a ritual performance. It really wasn't theater, in a way, the way people think of theater. You know, I don't really know.

Collings

Because there's that quote, you know, "With friends like this, the river doesn't need enemies."

MacAdams

Yes, from the L.A. Times Review, yes.

Collings

The L.A. Times Review. I mean, why?

MacAdams

You know, I don't know, but everybody hated it. The woman I was seeing then, who was an artist named Nancy Reese [?], basically left me over it, because she thought it was such inferior art. But, you know, it didn't matter in a way, because Pat and I and Roger knew that we had founded Friends of the Los Angeles River in some way we didn't really understand, but we knew we had accomplished this thing we had set out to do.

MacAdams

Then after that, you know, I mean, the theater even hated it so much that if Pat hadn't been this huge guy, they wouldn't have paid us the three hundred dollars or whatever they owed us for this performance.

Collings

I mean, did the audience, like, throw things at you?

MacAdams

No, no. It was just that nobody--you know, people were sort of embarrassed. You had that feeling like we don't know what to say, you know, and there weren't very many people. I mean, there probably couldn't have been more than ten or fifteen people in the theater. It was a small theater, anyway, and it was pretty empty. I don't know who was there. My friend Leslie Taplin, who I still am a friend with, was there, I think, and Nancy was there. I can't even remember who else was there.

MacAdams

So then I didn't really know what to do next, you know, and I kind of stumbled around trying to figure out what might be the next step. I ran into this Dutch guy who was living in L.A. at the time and was editing--he was kind of a--oh, there's a hawk. There's these red-tailed hawks that have been--just kind of just swoop by the window that have set up residency and just been destroying the pigeon population.

MacAdams

So--excuse me--I had met this Dutch guy, and--oh, I know what it was. This Dutch guy was a friend of a guy, of an extremely good designer from Rotterdam, who was living in L.A. at that time, working at Wet magazine a little bit and doing furniture design and some other things, a really talented guy named Henk Elenga.

MacAdams

Henk knew this other Dutch guy who was passing through L.A., staying in town for a while, and this other Dutch guy told me, "Oh, you should get it incorporated, you know, be a nonprofit. Go to Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts." Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts; so I thought, "Oh, that's a good idea." So I called Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, and the lawyer--there was only one volunteer lawyer, who was running the office.

Collings

[Laughs] Volunteer Lawyer for the Arts.

MacAdams

Right. You know, San Francisco, it was kind of a big deal, Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, but in L.A. there were not too many Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts at that point. There was none, except for this woman that I talked to on the phone, who turned out to be Joanne Kyger--not Joanne Kyger; JoAnne Klabin--who then, I mean, after we talked for two or three months, she referred me to a guy who was a lawyer and a very nice guy, who had very little experience. He agreed to do bylaws for us, and JoAnne and I kept talking on the phone, and eventually we started--because like I said, Nancy Reese had left me by this time, months before.

MacAdams

So JoAnne and I started to go out, started dating, and then eventually we got married, and now have these two teenage kids. And she hated Friends of the Los Angeles River ever since, because it just got in the way of everything in our lives, my making money, my focus, and she didn't really understand, because at that time I was still writing screenplays. I was always getting paid for them, but just minimum. None of them ever had the remotest chance of being made, and I was working for people I didn't particularly respect.

MacAdams

But JoAnne really thought like she had married a screenwriter, and she didn't really understand the poetry part at that time. Maybe she does now, but I don't know, but now it's way too late for that. So, anyway, so we got incorporated, and we made these bylaws. None of us knew what we were doing in terms of the bylaws, which came back to bite us many years later.

MacAdams

Then, you know, I would just talk about it, and one of the things that I learned was that you had to have a sense of humor about it, because everybody thought

you were joking. I mean, I realized--I thought that when I started it, that it would just be a question of like saying to people, "But this could be a lot better." But I didn't realize--it took me a while to understand that there are people--that the idea of a Los Angeles River had really disappeared from people's consciousness. Even a lot of maps didn't say "L.A. River." They would just say "Flood Control Channel."

MacAdams

So the river had really kind of disappeared from consciousness, because really, I mean, the river had been the city's water supply until water came from the Owens Valley, which was--I can't remember--1912, 1913, or something like that, and then after that there was plenty of water, and the river really couldn't support a city of more than a couple of hundred thousand people. So the river became just basically a kind of a joke and a nuisance, you know, that it would occasionally flood, and there were big floods in 1934 and 1938, which a bunch of people got killed, but way upstream, actually. There was like, I guess, a landslide that actually killed most of the people. But it became--you know, there had been attempts to channelize the river from, I think, like the late nineteenth century, but they couldn't. They just didn't have the technology.

MacAdams

So when these floods in 1934 and 1938, I think, happened, it was a good excuse to go after federal money. By that time there had been--I think during Franklin Roosevelt's administration there was a battle over the flood control issue, who was going to control flood control, between, I think, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Army Corps won. So this became their first major flood control project. Before that they'd basically been about keeping rivers open for commerce, essentially, like the Mississippi and the Missouri and those big rivers that had lots of barges. So the basic principle was just get the water to the ocean as fast as possible. There wasn't really any other principle, you know. So the idea of ecology or anything like--

Collings

That didn't exist, yes, at that time.

MacAdams

It didn't exist. So the river was--and at that time, I remember, the water reclamation plants hadn't kicked in, so basically there were no trees on the river. There was s_____ three areas where there wasn't concrete on the bottom. One of them was the river around Griffith Park and on down to just Frogtown and just north of downtown. Another one, which was in the Sepulveda Basin, which had been built a little before that time as a flood control measure. But it was also where the city had, over the objection of the Corps of Engineers, had put this big water treatment plant, the Tillman Water Reclamation Plant.

MacAdams

So there wasn't water really in it, and there wasn't anything to distinguish it in any way. You know, so here I was; I started talking about it. At that time--Gary Snyder has always been a teacher of mine, and a mentor, and Gary was coming down. There used to be at the L.A. Theater Center around Spring Street there was a poetry series that was sponsored by the Lannan Foundation, and Gary was going to read. So I knew he was coming down, and I asked him if he would do something earlier in the day at my--at JoAnne and ours house in Silver Lake, which was to give a reading about--poems about rivers, because I knew he had millions and plenty of them. So he agreed to do that, and we just filled our living room with people, and I got enough money, basically, to buy stationery. I used a little bit of the money from the event, the Friends of Los Angeles River performance that we'd got that money, I had to make bumper stickers that said "Friends of the Los Angeles River."

MacAdams

So the next event then was that I got all these artists through High Performance, and we decided--we did a walk in the L.A. River. And it was really fun, really interesting. Everybody had--it was all artists, basically. It was probably twenty or thirty people, maybe it was a little bit more, and all these people were walking up the river, you know, and wearing L.A. River bumper stickers on their backs. There was a guy--this band called Public Image Ltd. I don't know if you ever heard of them, but they were the band that sort of spun off of the Sex Pistols, and one of the guys who was in the band--not Johnnie Lydon, but the other guy, whose name is slipping my mind right now--was a junkie, and he was going out with the secretary at the L.A. Weekly. I had met him from the L.A. Weekly. So he put together like this great industrial music and reggae tape. It was like a three-hour tape, and we had it in a wheelbarrow. It was leading us as we went out to the river. So that was really the first Friends of the Los Angeles River action after the performance.

MacAdams

But Gary's reading that night at the L.A. Theater Center, there was a thousand people there maybe, and Gary said that he'd been that afternoon to the first meeting, which it really was, in the sense--I mean, not formally so, but the first gathering of people, and he said, "I've been to the first meeting of the Friends of Los Angeles River." And I remember, you know, people laughing, and then Gary going, "Don't laugh," you know, like that. So that was the first public mention of Friends of the Los Angeles River. But basically there was just me and a handful of people for a long time.

MacAdams

Then I don't know what year it was, but this guy Richard Katz, who was a very powerful State Assemblyman, decided that he was going to get some free

publicity by announcing that he was going to sponsor a bill to sort of begin the process of turning the river into a freeway.

Collings

Right.

MacAdams

There had actually been, I think, earlier, you know, back in the forties, I think there was some idea to do that. I don't know where he got the idea, because I didn't really know him very well. I'd met him a couple of times. I've still only met him a handful of times. But I remember, there was a picture in the L.A. Times of him, and he's got this drawing. He's standing on a bridge overlooking the river with this drawing of the freeway, the L.A. River Freeway.

MacAdams

I got a call. I was working; I was editing videotape at that time. I was working with a guy named John Dorr at a place called EZTV in West Hollywood, and that's where we edited lots of documentaries together. We were in editing, and I got a phone call, and so somebody said he was a reporter for the L.A. Times, and that this guy Richard Katz had just had this press conference about putting a freeway in the river, and what did I think about it. I said, "Over our dead bodies." Then I was just like really angry at myself, because I felt like I'd lost my temper, and I tried to call him back to give him like a softer quote, but he didn't take my call.

Collings

No, no, because he likes that quote.

MacAdams

Yes, that was a good quote, and I understood that [unclear] even better. But the next day, sure enough, there was an article in the L.A. Times, and it said that Lewis MacAdams of Friends of the Los Angeles River says, "Over our dead bodies." You know, and it was the breakthrough for us, because people first started to know that there was such a thing as Friends of Los Angeles River, and people began to take it seriously, somebody that would say something like that, so out of the sort of common political weasel-word parlance.

Collings

Right. Exactly.

MacAdams

So from then on it was just this kind of real slow accretion of people, and people starting to get to know who we were and what we were doing. We weren't really doing much. I mean, we really didn't have an organization, per se. There was basically just me. We didn't have an office or anything like that. We didn't have any money. But we did have stationery. [Collings laughs.] You know, so I started writing stuff, you know. I started doing--I can't remember-- letters to the editors, and I think I did an op-ed piece or two. I don't really

remember, but it was nothing--after the Katz thing. I don't know what would have been the next really significant event, you know.

MacAdams

I remember--again, I can't remember the date of it, but when we got our first employee was basically a guy named Martin Schlageter, and Martin had just graduated from USC. We somehow--a foundation, a little bitty foundation, found us and offered us some money if we could have a minority--it was like if we had a minority that we could hire. So I asked Martin if he was a minority of any kind, and it turned out that he was 1/32--what was it--some kind of Idaho Indian; not Nez Perce, but the Gros Ventre, Gros Ventre. And I said, "That's probably good enough," and I called these guys back, and they gave us enough money to hire him for a year. I can't remember how much it was, but maybe \$15,000, something like that.

MacAdams

Then I was starting to make speeches. Anybody that would listen to me, I would talk, and I got invited by a guy to talk to the Downtown Lions Club. At that meeting I met one of the Downtown Lions, who was this very straight guy. He was a wonderful person; was a fundraiser for the YMCA--not for the whole YMCA, but he was like the fundraiser for, I can't remember, the Pasadena Y or the South Pas[adena] Y. He liked what we were doing, and he agreed to be on the board, and as far as I can remember, at that time the only board members were me and JoAnne and Pat Patterson and the woman that he later married, Susanna [], and I think that was it. Pat was in the process of moving to New York already by then, and JoAnne wasn't that interested, and Susanna wasn't, either, and so it was just basically me.

MacAdams

So then I think Bob became the first person that really, outside my immediate family, that was a board member, and Bob functioned for a number of years as kind of the "Mr. Inside," and I was "Mr. Outside." I would go out and give the speeches, and Bob would, you know, like set up rudimentary budgeting. We didn't really have any money. Then we ran out of money to pay Martin, and I hit on the idea of putting him on the board so that he would work for free, which lasted until he got another job a few months later. So then we didn't even have anything like--we didn't have any employees or an office again.

MacAdams

Again, I'm really bad at years about this thing, and I can't remember how we heard of Melanie Winter. Melanie became--she had done some fundraising for women's issues, breast cancer issues, and she had worked as a volunteer at KCRW. She was a former Broadway dancer. She was from the Valley, but she had gone to New York when she was sixteen and been a chorus line dancer in lots of shows; The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas was one, I think. She was a

big blonde lady and very attractive and really smart, and she was house-sitting for somebody in Ojai, and had been kind of around the fringes of show business for a long time.

MacAdams

Bob and I went to visit her in Ojai, and we both just thought this lady is really--this is great energy. So somehow--I can't remember how we got enough money to pay her, but we did get enough money to pay her, at least part-time, so she became the--Martin had been the executive director of a one-person organization, and then we ran out of money, and then--we didn't call him the executive director, but Melanie insisted on being called the executive director, even though it was just still a one-person operation. Martin was just the director.

MacAdams

So what's the next step?

Collings

Well, let me just ask you, you know, you said at the time, just to quote you, "the odor was industrial" when you discovered the river. [Reads] "The odor was industrial. The scene was a latter-day urban hell." I mean, was there something about this industrial venue that attracted you? Would you have been as attracted to a forlorn, forgotten river that had perhaps bucolic qualities?

MacAdams

That's a good question. Maybe not, because I certainly was never attracted to any river particularly before. I mean, it wasn't part of my--I mean, I wasn't like a kayaker, and when I was growing up in Dallas, the Trinity River, which runs east of Dallas, was basically just completely blocked off by a big kind of--nonstructural, but big levees and a flood control channel. The black people lived on the other side, you know, because that was all lowlands that could still flood. So the Trinity River was not part of my life at all. I mean, the Trinity River sort of divided modern Dallas from old-time, funky, southern white trash, black people, housing-project Dallas. And I don't even know where the Mexicans were. I mean, they were not a factor in my growing up.

MacAdams

But the point was that I didn't have any background in rivers, you know. I had paid attention to the little creek that runs through Bolinas. It was our water supply, so I was aware; you know, I paid attention to the water supply. But you would be amazed at how small this creek is that supplies the water--and still supplies the water--for Bolinas.

MacAdams

So, really, I didn't have any background in that, you know, but I really did have this sense of yin and yang, you know, that I knew that something this fucked up had to change. So that the industrial hell aspect--although I wasn't aware of it

exactly until I did the performance. I mean, I didn't really know. I mean, I knew it was like this big concrete river, but I didn't know really anything more than that until I actually walked it the first time. You know, it's interesting. I mean, it was--you know, how, why I was attracted, it may have been just like orneriness, you know.

Collings

Yes. That's what I was wondering, yes.

MacAdams

Yes, like a perversity, you know.

Collings

That was the word that came to my mind.

MacAdams

It's very, very likely to be true, because again, you know, that was before the water reclamation plants came online, so there wasn't any trees. There wasn't any bucolia on the river at all, that I was aware of, anyway. I don't even know if there were any trees, because we got into a huge battle the El Nino winter of whatever that was, because the county wanted--Public Works just basically wanted to chop down every tree in the river. That was there by that time, and I assume that had been policy beforehand, that if trees ever dated to--

Collings

Was that '93, perhaps?

MacAdams

That sounds about right, yes. Yes, I think so. It was the first time anybody had talked about El Nino, and so there was this big panic, although it was kind of a manufactured panic, I would say. There was a huge confrontation. This was after, I guess, the next big thing that we did.

MacAdams

We attracted a couple more board members along the way, this woman Sara Rose, who was a film executive, who had been, I guess, a biology major at Cal in college and sort of had a kind of interest in it; a guy named Frank O'Brien, who lived in San Pedro--who's now back on the board after all; he stopped for years and years--a very, very smart, Jesuit-trained political head, who at that time was running the West Coast branch of a family ice cream business, and who was a Boston guy.

MacAdams

Leslie Taplin was on the board; that's the other person. Leslie had grown up in the Bay Area. So there was a real sense that--and I think Sara probably had spent time in the Bay Area, too, so there was a real presence that, you know, of myself and Leslie and other people that I can't really think who they were, but people that had actually lived in places where people talked about ecology

already, or knew there were rivers in their lives and their backgrounds. A lot of those people were the core of Friends of Los Angeles River.

Collings

Yes. Now, you said last time that you had been very influenced by the work of Joseph Beuys, and going in, you sort of thought of your work with the L.A. River as being a kind of social sculpture.

MacAdams

Yes. Well, I didn't know those terms at the time. I knew about Beuys a little bit, but Beuys has kind of risen more over the years. Robert Smithson was much more of an influence at that time on me, and his giant earthworks and his works. I mean, he died really young--he was in a plane crash--and he didn't get to build very much. I mean, the only thing that he really built that was like a major piece of his was the Amarillo--well, there are two; there's that Amarillo Ramp, which is an omega-shaped ramp in a stock pond in a rich guy's ranch outside of Amarillo, Texas.

MacAdams

But the big work was the Spiral Jetty in the Great Salt Lake, which was this jetty that he built that had a spiral that jugged out from the shore on the Great Salt Lake. It was a place that, I guess the Salt Lake goes up and down, so sometimes it was submerged, and then it would come out, and there would be all these salt crystals, so there'd be all these different colors. You know, it was a masterpiece and really a work that I thought was incredibly beautiful. Before I came back to Bolinas and San Francisco, after having hepatitis back in the seventies, early mid-seventies, I had gone to see the Amarillo Ramp and had written some stuff about it. I guess maybe I've talked about this; I was hoping to write a biography of Smithson, and Richard Serra, the sculptor, wouldn't let it happen.

MacAdams

But the work interested me, and I saw the work as the Friends of the Los Angeles River and the L.A. River as a kind of a massive earthwork. It was more from an art point of view than it was from an ecology-environmental point of view.

Collings

But as more people become involved, the ones that you've just mentioned, did they share your interest in--

MacAdams

No, not so much.

Collings

There was a sort of a shift at that point.

MacAdams

Yes. Well, you know, originally the people that were involved were people that were artists, because those were the only people I knew in L.A. But they were just marginally--I mean, they thought it was a good idea, and you know, people were giving me "attaboys," but they weren't really involved. Yes, I think pretty quickly, you know, the people that were involved were not people that were drawn to the art world particularly and didn't see it that way and saw it more as an environmental issue or a city beautification issue or, you know, a number of ways to look at it.

MacAdams

Tom LaBonge, who's now a city councilman, in those days was a--the dates, I'm really bad at dates, and so this sequence is semi-accurate, but it may not be perfectly accurate. But the first time politicians got involved was LaBonge, who had grown up in Silver Lake and was a civic guy and liked the river. He got Tom Bradley to do a little walk along the river, and we chose to do it right at where Eatz Café is. I don't know what they call it now, but that's what they called it, E-a-t-z, in those days, at Los Feliz on the river.

MacAdams

There was a parking lot really close to the river, and, I mean, I had enough experience as a journalist to know that guys carrying television cameras--especially in those days, because they were a lot heavier--didn't want to walk very far, so we chose that site so they would only have to walk a few feet to actually get to the river. Also, that's the part of the river where there's no concrete on the bottom, and trees were sort of happening by that time.

MacAdams

So we did this little odd walk, you know. It was just like we walked about fifty yards up, upstream, and then we came back down, and there were television cameras. So that was the first time any politician had actually acknowledged the river, other than Richard Katz. At that time there was a big Corps of Engineers project that had been in the planning stages and the development stages for a long time. It was to raise the levees on the lower twenty miles or so of the river from the Rio Hondo--I mean, the river, before Europeans started to channelize it, there wasn't really a discrete river.

Collings

Yes, it was more of a flood plain.

MacAdams

Yes. What's now considered the San Gabriel River and the Los Angeles River were basically the same river system. It was all shift; there was no permanent channel. But when the Army Corps of Engineers paved it and channelized it, they created this channel. They created these discrete rivers, and with a channel that kind of came out of Whittier Narrows--do you know where that is? It's kind of east, east-southeast Los Angeles County. It's like the Sepulveda Basin,

but much larger. Out of that, they could send water into the San Gabriel River or into the Los Angeles River, depending upon whatever reasons that they did.

MacAdams

The San Gabriel runs kind of to the other side of Long Beach, so Long Beach is basically in between the Los Angeles River and the San Gabriel River, and you know, in between are also all these southeast L.A. County cities, like Lakewood, named because there was a lake. All of these areas, that are basically very flood-prone, were very slow to be developed and weren't developed. The channelization of the river was, you know, always billed as a flood control issue, but it was also a real estate issue. I mean, for instance, all those that--vast areas between Long Beach and L.A. were basically areas that weren't developed until after the river was channelized, because they were all in the flood plain.

Collings

Right. Right. Exactly, yes.

MacAdams

But the Corps of Engineers, when they decided to do this project, they decided that they had to put up walls and raise levees, because the capacity of the river, they had decided, was already full. It wasn't necessarily inaccurate, because once they had built the channel, it allowed all this development, and water that used to go into the soil now just went into storm drains and came into the river, because the L.A. River, the storm drain system is different than the sewer system. So most of the storm drains in Los Angeles go into the L.A. River.

MacAdams

So they decided to do this project, and it was the first sort of real issue. I mean, I remember going to meetings, and I would stand there, and I was the one person that would say, "This is a really bad idea. You're just separating the river from the people. There's other ways to do flood control."

MacAdams

By that time we had a couple more people on our board. There was a guy named Jim Danza, and Jim had graduated, I guess, in geography from Cal State Fullerton. Jim was more of a scientist, a real thoughtful, serious guy, who I think his background is a family of mailmen. Jim basically put together on his own, with really not very much background in it, an alternative way to deal with the flood possibilities.

MacAdams

We learned early on that it wasn't a good argument to argue that there wasn't a flood control danger, because there was. So the argument had to be framed in how do you do it in a way that's not a single-purpose solution. I mean, basically, what they were doing, the Corps was proposing and was moving

toward doing, was basically what they had done originally, which was basically treat the river solely as a flood control problem. And this was the same thing.

MacAdams

So we were an organization. Melanie hadn't come to work yet. I think Martin was still involved. At that point, because we didn't have a place, an office or a place to meet, we would meet at different places up and down the river. We were meeting, for some reason--I don't know how we happened to get it, but we were meeting in, I think, the City of Bell's City Council chambers. It was this little, you know, like a city council chamber, but on a very small scale.

MacAdams

That, as I recall, is where we voted to sue the County of Los Angeles, because the Corps was basically the county's client. Or, I mean, the county was the Corps' client, yes. It was a big decision for an organization like ours, which had a budget of, you know, next to nothing, to take on Los Angeles County and, indirectly, the Corps of Engineers. It was like all lawsuits; it was kind of an ugly thing. But again, it was one of those things that--you know, it was the only time we started to put together a coalition. TreePeople actually joined the lawsuit. I can't remember if Heal the Bay did or not; they might have. But we had a bunch of people that joined the lawsuit, but basically it was on our dime.

MacAdams

We had a volunteer lawyer, who was a woman named Jan Chatham Brown. Jan is like an expert on EIRs now, but in those days she was just--you know, they had not done any serious Environmental Impact Report or anything like that. They basically just finessed it along, feeling that there wasn't really any opposition, and they could just bulldoze it. So that was part of our lawsuit, was about not having done an Environmental Impact Report. I mean, in those days we were a little naive, I mean, because now you see you can get anybody. You can just hire somebody to write the Environmental Impact Report, whatever you want it to say, and if you pay them, people will write it. But we sort of thought it was more of a magic wand at that time.

MacAdams

This went on for months and months and months and months, and really made some bad blood between us and the County of L.A., which still plays out to this day. We basically lost the lawsuit; well, we lost it in the sense that they got to go ahead and build their project. But what we got out of it was we got the attorney's fees paid for, which Jan basically--she took part of it, but basically it allowed us to have a budget for the first time. I think that must have been how we hired Melanie. We had money from the lawsuit.

MacAdams

Also, the county and others agreed that there would be formed a kind of council or a body, some sort of deliberative body, which would bring together public

agencies and environmental people. Dorothy Green, who is one of the founders of Heal the Bay, was very central to this whole thing, and Dorothy was a woman that had a lot of prestige from founding Heal the Bay. At that time I think she was even on State Water Resources Board. She's pretty elderly, but she's still very active and has done--you interviewed her, right?

Collings

Yes.

MacAdams

I mean, Dorothy, in those days, was very active in what we were doing, and she and I actually even started an organization together that lasted a short period of time, called Unpave LA.

Collings

Oh, right. Yes.

MacAdams

It was really kind of driven more by her, but I was really into it, too. I mean, you know, I mean, this is a period of my life, I was living in meetings, not making any money at all doing anything.

Collings

Yes, she had also gone on to organize something called the San Gabriel Watershed District.

MacAdams

Yes. Not "District," but that was the outcome of the lawsuit, was the Los Angeles San Gabriel Watershed--

Collings

Council?

MacAdams

--Council, I think it was called.

Collings

Yes, I forget what the last half--

MacAdams

The court made that come into existence, so that was an outcome of the lawsuit, although it became just kind of a debating society, and not too much happened.

Collings

Well, she saw it as an organization that brought environmentalists and government--

MacAdams

Yes, and it did that.

Collings

--people together, and that there was a lot of cross-fertilization.

MacAdams

Yes, it was for the first time where all that was happening, you know, and Dorothy is a very reconciliatory person, unlike myself, really. So she made it work in a way that I--and I lost interest in it, because I'm just not--

Collings

Council, Watershed Council.

MacAdams

Yes, Watershed Council. You know, because it didn't seem like it could accomplish very much, and I try to avoid meetings. Even then I tried to avoid meetings. Now I don't go to very many, if I can help it. Then I was forced to, because I didn't have anybody working for us. Then Melanie came along, and she was a very articulate person and more militant than me, just because that's her nature. So she became really, in some ways, a real spokesperson for Friends of the Los Angeles River in those years.

MacAdams

She and I started getting into problems with each other, and it really kind of escalated and escalated. Well, there's another something else before that I wanted to mention, but what was it? The lawsuit, the settlement of the lawsuit--

Collings

The Watershed Council.

MacAdams

The Watershed Council. No, I guess that's--then Melanie became involved, and we were able to expand our activities. We just still didn't have an office. We operated out of her living room, basically, and paid her rent on a room of her house, which was something that maybe we shouldn't have done, because it again became a problem later, because Melanie didn't want us.

MacAdams

So this is another piece of the story, is the creation of the L.A. River Center. The River Center was Lawry's; had once been originally a railroad siding where Lawry's created its Lawry seasonings, essentially, and over the years it became the headquarters of Lawry's. I don't know how it happened, really, but there was a bunch of restaurants. They had like three or four or five restaurants there, and it was really probably on the east side, one of the only nice places to eat. So a lot of politicians of my age or a little older remembered it as that, as a really great place. They had all these gardeners and beautiful gardens. I don't know if you've ever been there.

Collings

I've been there, yes.

MacAdams

You know, it's still really nice. But now it [unclear]. It was slated to become the parking lot for the Home Depot, and they were going to bulldoze the whole thing, and it had gone very far towards being bulldozed. Then a few politicians,

Gloria Molina, for one, Richard Alatorre, for another--no, not Richard Alatorre, Richard [G.] Polanco, for another-- and sort of on the fringes was Mike Hernandez, who was the first district city councilman who, we came to learn, had a horrible cocaine problem and basically had been thrown out of his house and was living in his office. Then they busted him, and there was cocaine residue all over his office in the City Hall. He was totally ineffective; he was just a sad guy. But he got a little credit for it, but I think it was more, really, Polanco more than anybody, and Molina in second.

MacAdams

They worked out a deal where Joe Edmundson and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy--and I guess by that time they'd created their joint powers authority, the Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority--would take it, and half of it would be safe. Half of it would become Home Depot, and half of it would be what would be known as the River Center. To me, it was just amazing, because I didn't really think they had a chance. But they did, and they got it.

MacAdams

Several buildings were taken down, which they were sort of executive office buildings. I mean, the thing is built to look like it was built hundreds of years ago, but, in fact, it's from the mid-twentieth century, primarily. So the buildings that were taken down were no particular loss. Most of the gardens were saved, and the older buildings were saved. And that became the River Center, and that's when we got an office there. We were the first people to get an office there, because it was really created, you know, partly out of our work.

MacAdams

The goal was that it would be a place where environmental groups could be there inexpensively. Northeast Trees opened an office right next to ours, and years later Trust for Public Land is there now, and there were other things. When Mary Nichols was the secretary for resources under [Governor] Gray Davis, she had an office there. There was also all these cops. For some reason, they got partly a free rent for the cops' K-9 Patrol, so there were always these vicious dogs in the backseat of these police cars that were always parked around there.

MacAdams

I wanted to move into the River Center. Melanie didn't, because she liked us paying for her rent, so that became one of the issues. We had to stay there and keep paying her rent even while we moved into the River Center. But it was part of the issues that eventually led to her and I having a really bad falling-out. This came to a head around the Cornfield and the Taylor Yard battles, which were a couple of years later.

MacAdams

One of the things before that was this El Nino winter, when the county wanted to basically bulldoze every living thing in the river and, in fact, did bulldoze quite a bit. But there was this insane meeting with the County Department of Public Works, including this guy named Harry Stone, who was the head of the Department of Public Works at the time. When we had this meeting, it was in Zev Yaroslovsky's office, and there are all these people from Yaroslovsky's office and all these other people around. Stone kept referring to the river as "the flood control channel," and every time he said "flood control channel," I would interrupt him and say "river." We just got--it just got--

Collings

That sounds like a performance piece in and of itself.

MacAdams

It was totally insane, I mean, really angry, you know. But we got Yaroslovsky on our side on that one, and basically everything else was bulldozed, but not in his district. In his district I think the compromise was like they could only use chainsaws and cut one of every three trees or some weird compromise.

MacAdams

But if you ever look at Blake Gumprecht's book, there's a picture of me the day that I was trying to stop the bulldozers by myself. Blake happened to be nearby and came, somehow showed up; I can't even remember how. Maybe I called him. I don't know how it happened. But he took a picture of me in front of one of the bulldozers. You know, it was just crazy. You know, I mean, I felt like I needed a course in anger management after that one. You know, because I slipped. I mean, I was like running around in the mud trying to stay in front of this bulldozer, and at one point I slipped and really almost fell under a tractor.

MacAdams

So that part was happening. The lawsuit was settled. We moved to the River Center. Melanie got involved. Melanie had high energy. We started taking on other issues, and I'm trying to think what were some of the issues that we were really dealing with before the Taylor Yard and the Cornfield.

Collings

Well, you started doing a number of events, such as the Great River--the River CleanUps.

MacAdams

Yes, we started that. Right, the Gran Limpieza, the Great Los Angeles River CleanUp. This will be our nineteenth year, and I think we skipped one year, so that would put it back twenty years ago, '88, something like that.

Collings

How did you get the word out for that?

MacAdams

Well, the first year there was only like thirty people. We tried all kinds of different things. I mean, you know, sometimes we would get some press about it. For years we worked pretty closely with the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, and really, they made up in the first years--I mean, the L.A. Conservation Corps and then the Long Beach Conservation Corps; I think the California Conservation Corps was involved a little bit, too--would make up the majority of the people that would show up at the cleanups. You know, we just did whatever we could. We were slowly building a mailing list, and it was just a real gradual thing. I mean, really, the first year there was thirty people. Maybe there was only one site the first year.

MacAdams

Something I just remembered--I can't remember what year it was, but when we did our first fundraiser. At that time we had another guy on our board who was named Denis [Schure]--oh, god, I can't believe I can't think of Denis' last name. That will come back to me. Denis with one n. He was a city planner, and he was a canoeist and kayaker.

Collings

Oh, right, right, yes.

MacAdams

Denis Schure.

Collings

Yes, exactly. [Telephone rings.]

MacAdams

Hold on. [Tape recorder turned off.]

MacAdams

I really only want to do another half hour or so.

Collings

Oh, that's fine. That's totally fine.

MacAdams

All right. I mean, I don't know if we'll finish, but I don't know, we can probably just keep talking eventually.

MacAdams

So Sara Rose decided that she would do our first fundraiser. So I asked Tom Hayden if he would be the speaker for it, and we did it--there's an area that's next to the river but on the other side of the river, before the freeway, before the [Interstate] 5 was built, Griffith Park, it was on both sides of the river. So there's these little vestiges of Griffith Park, this little nine-hole pitch and putt golf course where Eatz Café is, and by Los Feliz is a piece which is on the other side of the river from the park, and this area called the Bette Davis area. I guess she lived on that street. It's that real horsey area like around Riverside

Drive, and it's a nice little park there, a lot of big old sycamores from before the river was channelized.

MacAdams

Sara Rose, she brought tablecloths. I can't remember how we had it catered, or if we had it catered or whether we cooked it ourselves. But before that event, we had promised everybody that showed up that they could have a kayak ride on the L.A. River, because of Denis.

Collings

Yes, this three-day journey down the--yes.

MacAdams

Yes. So Denis and I that morning--we were going to do the event sort of late in the afternoon, early evening. This must have been the summer; it must have been a long day. So Denis called me, and he said, "You know, there's not anyplace--we really can't kayak here. It's not deep enough." So we went out and for nine hours moved rocks around the river to create a channel that was deep enough for his kayak to go--I don't know--500 yards in. So that was like the kind of commitment, you know, the madness of our commitment that we had at that point.

MacAdams

The event, we lost thousands of dollars; I mean, it was a complete failure. But Tom had been in Ireland, and he actually flew back to get there in time to speak. It really made me understand his greatness, which has been challenged by me a number of times since then, because he and I don't really--he sort of thinks of FOLAR as having sold out.

Collings

Sold out in what sense?

MacAdams

I don't know. We're just not--I don't know. You know, it's like Tom is--that's an easy thing for him to say, you know.

Collings

I mean, your mission is to raise the profile of the river, to restore the river, and those things are taking place.

MacAdams

It's funny. I mean, Tom is a difficult character, and difficult for me, anyway. I remember, you know, he had a heart attack a number of years ago, and I hadn't seen him for a while, and there was an event. When we won the Cornfield battle, there was a couple of big press events around, and I think this one, Gray Davis spoke. It was one of those events where the people that actually did the work are sort of shuttled to the sidelines, and then the politicians now step into this safe issue. Which was fine with me; I mean, that just showed that we won.

MacAdams

Tom happened to be there. There was a guy that worked for the city that--we had tie-dyed our T-shirts, our River CleanUp T-shirts. One of the things that I started doing with the T-shirts--I guess it was really kind of before T-shirts became so common that they started to seem like really a cliché--but I would get a different artist every year to design the T-shirt.

MacAdams

The guy that printed our T-shirts worked for the City of L.A., and it was kind of a moonlighting gig. He made up some baseball caps that said "Friends of the Los Angeles River," and I think at this event I was wearing them. He also, at some point--and I'm not sure if it was before this--made up a few jackets that were black and white that said "Friends of the Los Angeles River" on them. I can't remember whether it was just the hat, or it was the hat and the jacket, or if it was just the jacket, but I was wearing something that said "Friends of the Los Angeles River" the day of this event.

MacAdams

Tom came up to me, or we started talking. He was just kind of hanging around in the background. He hadn't really kind of --I mean he was over open-heart surgery, but he hadn't really recovered his sort of vim, you know. He said something to me, you know, something real negative about these jackets or this hat, and kind of let me know that we weren't the darlings anymore, you know. We weren't the grassroots, the all-volunteer darlings; that we were just another environmental group, because he's been real harsh, for instance, on Heal the Bay for years as having basically accommodated itself to basically to West Side concerns; which, you know, I mean, it's not totally inaccurate, but you have to do what you have to do. It was kind of a falling-out with Tom.

MacAdams

But anyway, he did show up and do this really great speech for this benefit that we lost all this money on.

Collings

Some benefit.

MacAdams

Yes. I mean, all that we salvaged was some nice tablecloths and nice napkin holders and napkins that Sara had sprung for herself. I think Sara, because she's a pretty high-end executive in the movie business, I think she might have covered the loss. I vaguely remember it that way. But it was one of those, like you learn by doing, and learned that there's some ways you can make money and some ways you can't, and that was one of the ones that we didn't do anything quite like that.

MacAdams

Although it eventually led to the FOLAR Fiestas a number of years later, which are basically somewhat the same thing, although we didn't give awards in those

days. But it was a sit-down dinner. Now we've done it for years at the River Center, although we may move it this year.

Collings

So now we're reading in the paper about the master plan, the river master plan, which has been proposed by the ad hoc committee. Would there be an ad hoc committee putting forth this master plan without FOLAR?

MacAdams

Oh, I don't think so. You know, I mean, I'm vain enough to think there wouldn't have been anything without FOLAR. I mean, we became the voice of the river, and our newsletter was called Current News . After a while it said "The Voice of the River." There were no other organizations that were dealing with the river or looking at the river as a viable something to work on. That became an issue really more or less, in my mind, anyway, around the time of the Cornfield's and Taylor Yard battles, which became much larger.

MacAdams

FOLAR organized the thing, and our board member Chi Mui was central to it. A guy named Arthur Golding, who was an architect, was central to it. Then the Natural Resources Defense Council got involved in it, and another lawyer, Robert Garcia, who's kind of a rabble-rousing attorney who runs now something called the City Project. But it was a large-scale, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-class coalition.

MacAdams

At that point the river started to be on other people's radars, too, and it became a situation that--it took us a while, I think, to really adjust to being not the only game in town. It took us a while to really understand what our place was, you know, in this sort of different environment where people had started to hear about the river, and where certainly from an activist point of view, the river became something people were interested in.

MacAdams

I mean, the first article in the downtown news about Friends of the Los Angeles River was by a fellow poet named Jack Skelly, who was editing it at that time. Then Mike Davis did a piece, and it was a cover story of the L.A. Weekly. That was the story where--did I tell you this one last time?

Collings

No. About the Mike Davis story?

MacAdams

Yes.

Collings

No.

MacAdams

Again, I can't remember exactly. This was probably during the battle over raising the walls, because that raised our profile to a point where a few people began to notice us, and Mike was one of them, because Mike's out in front or has been for many years. Mike called me and said he wanted to write a piece about the L.A. River, and I was just thrilled, you know, partly because it was good publicity, but partly because, you know, Mike Davis was, to me, somebody that really mattered. That was a real imprint of something happening important in the Friends of the Los Angeles River.

Collings

Yes.

MacAdams

I said, "Well, great. Let's go for a walk along the river."

MacAdams

He said, "Well, I want to do some more work on it, research it, and then I'll come back to you and then we can do that."

MacAdams

So I didn't hear from him for, I don't know, a month or two. And he called and said we'd get together, and he said that he had actually written the article, and he just wanted me to look it over. When he showed it to me, it was like he had made up a complete interview with me.

Collings

How strange.

MacAdams

But it was a great interview. [Collings laughs.] It made me look like I knew far more than I knew, because Mike knew more than I knew. So I was like, "Sure," you know, "make me sound like I know what I'm talking about," you know. It turned out that L.A. Weekly didn't until years later that Mike had basically faked this whole thing, because I never said anything to anybody, and it was a front-page cover story in the Weekly about the river and about Friends of the Los Angeles River. So really people heard of us, a lot of people, then.

MacAdams

So there were these several different kinds of events that were occurring that was bringing the river--

Collings

There was the piece on you in the New Yorker as well.

MacAdams

Yes. That was a little later. That was basically after the Cornfield battle. It was a curious piece, in a way. I mean, it was accurate, but the guy that wrote it interviewed my wife at the end of it, and she really said some really sort of--I mean, basically, you could read it as like her declaring the end of our marriage. You know, when it was printed, it certainly seemed like--that's what I heard

from a lot of friends is that, "God, you know, you get an article about you in the New Yorker, and your wife trashes you."

Collings

Well, I mean, it fit into the pattern of a lot of New Yorker articles.

MacAdams

Yes, and I felt it was accurate. I didn't think of as being--you know, it was like JoAnne didn't sabotage me. I mean, she was just telling him how she felt about it, and it wasn't anything I didn't know. We'd been battling over it for years and years, and it had become a real basic issue, because I wasn't making any money, and there wasn't any money coming into FOLAR, and then when we got some--because I had never wanted for it to be my life work.

MacAdams

I mean, I understood that I'm essentially a writer, and I had these skills, these political skills. But I'm not like Andy Lipkis. I mean, Andy built his life around this project, and in a real sense, so did Mark Gold, even though he wasn't the founder of Heal the Bay, but he's been there a long time. I never wanted that. I wanted to create--I considered part of the artwork to create this institution, Friends of the Los Angeles River. I knew that it couldn't just be me, you know. I don't know; or maybe it could have been, but in my mind, that wasn't the case.

MacAdams

So I never took money, and I sort of made it a point of letting people know, "I'm not taking money," so that people could be touched from an idealistic point of view. I'm a fairly idealistic person, but it was a kind of political calculation that didn't take into account my family, and it cost me dearly, you know, and that article in the New Yorker basically just sort of laid out the situation. And it had come sort of after this big triumph in the Cornfield and Taylor Yard. I mean, the Cornfield came first, and it was already basically a done deal that it was going to be a million square feet of warehouses, and the mayor wanted it.

Collings

Yes, [Mayor Richard] Riordan.

MacAdams

Yes, Riordan. Yes, Riordan wanted it. His business team, which at that time was led by a guy named Rocky Delgadillo who went on to be the city attorney. He was pushing it. They had worked out a deal with the Housing and Urban Development in Washington to get a bunch of money to basically pay the developer to clean up the site. You know, it's one of those; the skids are greased, you know.

MacAdams

We had--oh, I know, that's a whole other aspect of it is that we had--one of the things that we were doing around that time--really, Melanie had a lot to do with

this; she kind of centered this--was that we did two, at least two, planning charrettes. We did one that was based on trying to organize all the media organizations, the film companies. There was like six of them along the river, from Universal and Geffen and Disney and NBC. Warner Brothers and all these studios moved to be near the river, because the river then became kind of a back lot, you know. It could be a jungle or it could be the Wild West. When they left Hollywood to go to the Valley, they basically set up all along the L.A. River.

MacAdams

So we had an idea that we would try to put together all the studios with all the enviros, and just start to create like a studio stretch of the Los Angeles River. It was kind of a failure. It didn't really work, because the studios wanted to have nothing to do with it. Even though we did it at--what's it called, CBS--it's CBS' rental facility, which is right off Laurel Canyon. The guy that runs it--it's where they shot Seinfeld. It straddles the river. It's right where the confluence, I guess, of where Coldwater Canyon meets the river, or Laurel Canyon; now I'm not thinking about it, I can't remember which one.

MacAdams

So we did it there, but it really didn't succeed. But what did succeed, and this was really Melanie's baby more than anything, was this River through Downtown, and we did a real elaborate planning charrette. We did neighborhood workshops in four neighborhoods. We did it in Chinatown and downtown and in Cypress Park and Boyle Heights. We'd go to the elementary schools and ask for permission to use like their cafeteria or auditorium. Then we would send home fliers with all the kids in their backpacks and have drop-in sessions with [unclear] architects. Arthur Golding was central to this. People would start drawing up images of the L.A. River.

MacAdams

That's where we first heard about the Cornfield, where people in Chinatown were starting to be interested in the Cornfield. That's where I met Chi Mui, who worked for Richard Polanco as his Chinatown deputy and was an activist in Chinatown, who had come from Chinatown in New York and was married to a Chinese woman who was very--well, actually, I guess they were just in the process of getting a divorce. She was also a very political person. But Chi was very soft-spoken; she was a kind of hard person.

MacAdams

Chi allowed us to be part of the discussion in Chinatown, and brought in a lot of--various family associations joined in this whole battle because of Chi. I mean, Chi was the central person to it. I can't remember where I was going with this--oh, so this all became part of this charrette, this River through Downtown planning charrette. And the ending of it, we had a whole weekend where all

these designers take the ideas from all these workshops and start drawing up proposals based on what people in the neighborhoods wanted.

MacAdams

The most salient idea, the one that I think was the most far-reaching, was the Cornfield battle came out of that. But really probably the other thing that was most important out of that was we had like a Saturday then where we had panels on all this stuff, and it was the first time where sort of Central City, Eastside politicians met Westside enviros. My joke at the time was FOLAR was the only environmental organization east of the 405. It wasn't totally true, but it was kind of true. You know, none of the organizations that were like dealing with Eastside issues had anything to do with the environmental--

Collings

Well, there are environmental justice groups, but FOLAR is a little bit different, yes.

MacAdams

Yes, and environmental justice, even that was just beginning, really.

Collings

It was very early on, yes.

MacAdams

People were starting to talk about it, but the River through Downtown was really the first time where people actually got together. We saw the Cornfield issue, and we went to Steve Soboroff, who was the mayor's--he didn't even have an environmental deputy. Soboroff, who was basically the developer, and a very successful one at that, you know, we went and talked to him about our ideas, and he just basically shined us on completely.

MacAdams

Then we found out soon thereafter that this Majestic Realty, this development company, had already made this quiet deal with the mayor's office. They were good friends. Ed Roski, Jr., is the guy that runs that company. They all were sort of working together to build a million square feet of warehouses there. Then the Taylor Yard thing was happening more or less at the same time, and FOLAR paid for that, too, and again Jan was involved in it.

MacAdams

But that's when the fallout with Melanie really got bad. I said earlier that, because we didn't really know how to deal with our nonprofit status and our bylaws, one of the things that we didn't really know how to do in our bylaws, we had in the bylaws, the director of the organization was automatically on the board of the organization. There was no provision for removing the person, and Melanie quit as director, so we didn't have a director. She was never a great fundraiser; we didn't really have any great fundraisers then. But Melanie stayed on the board, and the board just turned into this horrible battlefield between me

and Melanie. It got so bad that I missed a meeting, and the board decided to send me and Melanie to a psychiatrist.

Collings

Oh, my god. [Laughs]

MacAdams

Yes, it was so insane. It was so insane. Then the psychiatrist met Melanie and met me and said, "You can't be in the same room," so she talked to us separately. It was just a terrible time. We lost several of our board members. They just couldn't stand it, you know. They were volunteers, really good people, like Bob Warnock, the guy who had been our treasurer for years, who was like really the bulwark of the organization, quit over it. Dan Rosenfeld, a very progressive downtown developer, quit over it. And, you know, those kinds of losses are hard to come back from. So, you know, finally after about a year of this, Melanie finally resigned from the board, but it took a long time to come back from that.

MacAdams

Oh, there was another piece of that. I didn't want her involved with the Cornfield, because she and I weren't getting along at all. Chi and I worked really well together, and I just didn't trust Melanie anymore. But she stayed involved with the Taylor Yard, and she made it like an issue. It was like our divorce settlement, was that she would handle the Taylor Yard issue, and I was like, "Okay, fine. Just leave me alone."

MacAdams

I didn't realize at the time that she was starting her own organization and was basically acting in the Taylor Yard as the River Project rather than as Friends of the Los Angeles River, even though we were paying her. It was another of the issues that--so then when it comes out that victory is decided, somehow FOLAR is not really part of it, you know; it was the River Project. So it was another thing that I ended up resenting Melanie mightily for, and we've never, to this day, really ever gotten it back together.

Collings

So what is your opinion of the master plan?

MacAdams

I think it's good. I think that they were forced to stay away from downtown. The mayor's office really didn't want them messing with the industrial areas along the river and downtown, and they admit that they backed off of that. But I think that they did a really good job envisioning it, and I think they really did a good job in working the politics, you know, so that the city was on board the whole way.

MacAdams

The problem now is that the county won't okay it until the Corps of Engineers okay's it, and God knows when that's going to be. So they're kind of doing little incremental steps, and I think it's sort of taken as semi-gospel, you know. So we'll see how it evolves, but basically it's a very visionary, very far-out plan, you know.

Collings

It certainly seems to be, yes, but, of course, as you say, it is a plan; it's not--yes. It's a twenty-year plan, in fact.

MacAdams

Yes, exactly, you know, and it remains to be seen what's actually going to manifest out of it, but it's a good plan. I think it's really up to people that are involved and care about it to keep pushing it. So we will see.

MacAdams

I need to stop now. I'm losing my voice.

Collings

Okay. Okay. All right. [End of interview]

1.4. Session 4 (February 29, 2008)

Collings

Okay, Jane Collings interviewing Lewis MacAdams at his home, February 29th, 2008, and you were saying--

MacAdams

I was saying I thought that Not a Cornfield was a brilliant work, and it was a work that furthered the whole idea of art as politics, or art as social change, or art as social sculpture. It was a work that was controversial for a minute among a very small group of people with various agendas, some of which were anti-Semitic, I would say, and certainly anti-woman, and certainly moronic from an art point of view. But it led to--I think the artist Lauren Bon is a brilliant artist, and I think that it vastly widened the consciousness, the community consciousness of the cornfield, and of the possibilities of art as an embodiment of social change, as well as a force for social change.

MacAdams

It was an extraordinary event that went on for a year, really, and brought thousands of people down to the cornfield. You know, the argument was that it hijacked this park from the people, but the truth was it wasn't even a park at that point. It was just a big vacant lot, because the state hadn't done anything. I think that it pushed the state to become more active on the process. I mean, the problem with the state coming in, the state, you know, now owns two, these two big railroad yards, is that the State Parks doesn't have enough experience in their culture, their State-Parks culture, dealing with urban parkland, and they

don't know how to deal with a lot of the issues, or they're sort of painfully learning how to deal with a lot of issues.

Collings

What kinds of issues?

MacAdams

Well, I remember the first meeting that I went to on the Taylor Yard, and I think I talked a little bit about that the Taylor Yard Project was more Melanie Winters', who was our executive director, who was moonlighting with her own organization, and using the Taylor Yard as a way to build up her own organization. So I wasn't as intimately involved with it as I was with The Cornfield.

MacAdams

I remember going to the first meeting on the Taylor Yard with State Parks, and there were a lot of people there, maybe two or three hundred people, many of whom, the majority of whom were people that lived in the neighborhood. The State Parks was sort of beginning to ask, "What kind of park do you want?"

MacAdams

And everybody there said, "Well, how can we even have a park if we don't have streetlights on San Fernando Road?" which is basically a substitute freeway, and a highly dangerous road to cross. And State Parks, you know, they never had had to deal with traffic lights. They don't have a division. You know, it involves them in collaboration with the city. That's what I mean, they just didn't have the experience in it, and it slowed things down to some extent, although the Taylor Yard, the way the Taylor Yard has shaped up, it's been a much easier project in a way, because a lot of it was basically soccer fields, and it was just basically build the soccer fields. And there was a very strong constituency for that.

MacAdams

You know, I mean one of the things that you learn when you do this kind of stuff, I mean, is that quickly there becomes a kind of battle over what kind of, you know, whether passive or active recreation, and then it becomes like people with young families, which tend to be more Latino, and then people with grown kids that don't need parks the same way. And then there's the third side, which is like, you know, essentially something like a soccer field is a very barren ecological space, and how do you restore the ecology?

MacAdams

And all these, because there's so little--I mean, you know, 95 percent of the wetlands of Los Angeles County have been destroyed. I mean there's an obvious, huge need for parks of all kinds, and so you get these kinds of complex situations. And the way that the state sort of divided up the whole

question was to say that the Taylor Yard would be for active sports, and The Cornfield would be for more not-active sports.

MacAdams

But to me there was a huge mistake with The Cornfield, and so something that I was very opposed to, but I was really in a small minority on this one, was the idea of naming it as a State Historical Park, because I really feel like, you know, what everybody is talking about is their own history, and so it eventually becomes, well, are we talking about Latino history, black history, white history, Croatian history? Because there was a big Croatian settlement around The Cornfield. And you know, Italians, because Chinatown used to be Italian before they moved the Chinese out of the Union Station area. Yes, that's Chinatown--it wasn't until Union Station was built that that Chinatown became Chinatown as we know it.

MacAdams

And everybody's got a legitimate claim. But then, you know, like where does it stop? And sure enough, that's what I could see happening, and one of the reasons that The Cornfield has been such a difficult project to actually accomplish. I mean, right now there's basically half The Cornfield is being used as a park, and because they didn't want it to be active recreation, they built these little mountains, you know, that have absolutely no relationship to anything, so that people wouldn't sort of stretch out and do soccer fields.

MacAdams

And now George Hargreaves and Associates from San Francisco, the landscape architect, has gotten the gig to actually design the permanent park, is really kind of stuck with a situation where they have to celebrate all these different ethnicities, you know, instead of building a park, and so as far as I'm concerned, I mean I'm really like, my attitude is like trees and grass, you know, and watershed restoration, wetlands, stuff like that, and the idea that you're building some celebration of the arrival of the Chicanos, you know, all it does is it gives people something to fight, you know, territory to fight about.

Collings

It makes those very simple National Forest signs look very attractive.

MacAdams

Yes, exactly. And I know it's going to be really interesting, because Hargreaves and Associates, they're good people, they're very talented. I mean, they did Chrissy Field, converted Chrissy Field in San Francisco, that park which is now sort of by the Golden Gate, and just a wonderful mixture of active and passive recreation, and windsurfing and wetland restoration. I mean, it's obviously a lot more beautiful place than where The Cornfield is, but you know, they're being hamstrung by all this history that's now being laid on this place. And you know, there's some truth in it, that it is historic. That used to be where the trains would

come in, and people would get off, and that would be the migration to California. But you know, I mean in the first place, I mean it doesn't seem sort of outstandingly heroic exactly. I mean, you know, it's interesting, but it just doesn't seem--

Collings

A lot of people were very opposed to this rail line.

MacAdams

Yes, you know, it just seems like a waste of space. But we'll see how it eventually turns out, because it isn't done yet. But the fact is, I mean, they could do the Taylor Yard with soccer fields in a relatively short period of time, and The Cornfield has taken probably three times as long, because of this complex historical issue, which no one really wants to grasp, you know. So they spent a year bitching about Lauren doing this project, but I mean it's been, I don't know, five or six years, and there's still only a barely half-assed park in there. And the state really is--I don't know how this is going to happen, how long it's going to happen till it is a park. I mean, the state is running out of money.

MacAdams

They made a deal on the Taylor Yard where the City of L.A. actually runs the soccer fields, which they know how to do, but that's not going to be the case in The Cornfield. And you know, there's also the question of widening North Spring Street. I mean originally, it's in the D-Town [downtown] Visions pamphlet, but I mean there was a move to widen North Spring Street for the trucks that were going to be using this million square-foot of warehouses that never happened. But the Department of Transportation is still planning to widen North Spring Street. And then again, you've got the same situation as with the Taylor Yard, where you've got a dangerous place to get to.

Collings

Now, with State Parks you usually have some kind of admission fee or parking fee, or both.

MacAdams

Yes. That hasn't happened yet, you know, but I can imagine it happening. I mean, it's an interesting question. I hadn't really thought about that. But I haven't heard any talk about that happening yet, but it's interesting. I don't know. I don't know if that would come down. I mean, it seems like every other park in the state system it's happened.

Collings

It is, yes. I remember when [former governor] Gray Davis was in, he brought this down quite considerably--

MacAdams

Interesting question.

Collings

--and with the recall they bounced right back up.

MacAdams

Yes. It's an interesting question. I don't know. I haven't heard a word about that. But on the thirteenth Hargreaves and Associates is going to do kind of a presentation of where they're at in their design stage, and I'm going to ask that question.

Collings

And I know that the Castaic Lake Park was closed at a certain point because of operating-budget problems.

MacAdams

Interesting. Interesting.

Collings

And [unclear] I think there is an admission fee there. I mean every state park has, but yes, it's an interesting question. So how is it that FOLAR--is this something that you got involved in as a sort of environmental advocate, or were you getting involved in The Cornfield and Taylor Yards through FOLAR?

MacAdams

Oh yes, totally. The Yards--we did a planning charrette called The River Through Downtown years ago. I can't even remember what year it was. But Melanie was still working for FOLAR, and she was very much a part of that, and was very central to that. It was a collaboration with Arthur Golding for the Sierra Club, and I don't know, it seems to me, I guess the American Institute of Architects was part of it. I'm not sure who else besides that, AIA and the Sierra Club and FOLAR. And it was series of planning workshops in neighborhoods that we did. We did four of them I believe.

MacAdams

Let's see, where did we do them all? We did one in Cypress Park, which is across San Fernando Road from the Taylor Yard. We did one in Little Tokyo artists' loft district. We did one in Boyle Heights, and we did one in Chinatown. They were really great. What we did is we would go to the local elementary schools nearest to the--in the communities, and ask the principals if we could send home announcements with the kids, because I mean elementary schools always send home stuff on, I think it's Thursday, I can't remember exactly. And we got great cooperation, so we were able to reach out to really the most active people in the community, people with young kids, people with kids in elementary school, so it was really community-based. And then we would just basically have an open house for a day at the school.

Collings

So this is a FOLAR activity, just because it was basically adjacent.

MacAdams

Oh yes, right. Well, you know, I mean that's our goal, to build a Los Angeles River greenway from the mountains to the sea. I mean, that's one of the first things we ever said. So this is pieces of the Los Angeles River greenway. But these were both--especially The Cornfield. The Taylor Yard I think we had a little bit more inkling of. But The Cornfield really, sort of the desire to see something happening in The Cornfield, which at that point had been the railroads had shut down, the yards. I mean the Taylor Yard was still operating a very minimal capacity. The Cornfield had been completely shut down, and had been so for a number of years. I'm not sure how many, but it's more than five anyway.

MacAdams

And so it was becoming like something people in the community were like, "Well, what's going to be happening here?" So we had these four workshops, and then we had a weekend where we invited a lot of architects and landscape architects to look at what had come out of these workshops, and these workshops were totally community based. We'd be in like some like the lunchroom, or some public room, larger room in the elementary schools. People would come. We had coffee, cookies, etc. There would be architects, landscape architects at every table, and people would just talk about what they thought was needed in relation to the river.

MacAdams

And then we had a two-day weekend thing at Union Station. Was it Union Station? No, we had a cocktail party at Union Station. Then I can't remember where we did the actual workshop. But we had all these people drawing up what people had said, and sort of beginning to make it a coherent ideas of what we would do. Then we had a one-day thing at the library. I guess it was in the Ahmanson, that little theater in the library, and invited panels on what each of these communities were thinking about. It was really a landmark event, I thought. It was where the first time that central-city politicians who were in the process of becoming mostly Latino, it still wasn't quite there yet, not like it is today, but this is, I don't know, a number of years ago, seven or eight years ago; Riordan was still the mayor--and Westside environmentalists, the first time ever people started to really connect with each other, you know because those were still in the days when we would laugh that FOLAR was the only environmental organization east of the 405, which is obviously not the case anymore.

MacAdams

But that was one of the outcomes, one of the really long-term important outcomes of that whole process, The River Through Downtown planning process. But the other was The Cornfield. It became obvious that this was a place that we could really concentrate some effort on. And we went to Steve

Soboroff, who was then--the mayor, Riordan didn't even have an environmental deputy, and Steve was a developer, developed Toys R' Us sites all over the city. That was Riordan's idea of an environmental deputy. Steve's a really nice person. I mean, I'm not disparaging him, but he was like about as far from being an environmental deputy as you could be, and we showed him like these ideas for The Cornfield, and he was like basically just blew us off.

MacAdams

And the next thing we hear is that a deal has gone down between the mayor's business team, which was headed by this guy Rocky Delgadillo, who went on to being an entirely undistinguished city attorney, and Riordan, with Riordan's close friend named Ed Roski, who owned Majestic Realty, which is probably the largest industrial real-estate company in southern California, to basically to turn over this land. I mean, they'd even made a deal with HUD to get money to clean up the site, but because they were only cleaning it up to industrial standards, they didn't have to do really anything, so basically all the money was going to go to buy the land. So the government was basically going to buy the land for the developer, and put up a million square feet of warehouses.

MacAdams

You know, and we just said no, you know, it wasn't going to happen. There were three of us, Arthur Golding and Chi Mui, and Chi was a community activist, the deputy for one of the state assembly guys, Richard Polanco, and Arthur was probably the most knowledgeable person about central city and the river in terms of as an architect and as a teacher, and myself. We met with everybody we could meet in Chinatown. I mean, we were able to do things that no other group could have done, because Chi was fluent in Cantonese and Mandarin, and had been a community organizer in Chinatown for a couple of decades. He grew up in Chinatown in Manhattan, and was a very political person, and was involved as the secretary of one organization here. You know, just everybody knew him, and that allowed us access in a way that we would never be able to have.

MacAdams

I mean Chinatown, you know, it's just like in the movie Chinatown. It's a different world in terms, you know, of who owns what, and how things are decided. You know, so but we were able to not only to better than neutralize those people, those organizations like the Chinese Benevolent Association. I mean, I'm not saying their name right, but basically the organization that represented all the family associations, the Tongs, and the people, you know, groups like that, that really did have the power. I mean, Chinatown was kind of powerless relatively speaking, I mean in terms of the outside world.

Collings

But did this ultimately work because these Chinatown groups were behind The Cornfield?

MacAdams

Well, we built up a vast coalition. I think there was something like thirty-five organizations and neighborhood groups, environmental-justice groups, regular environmental groups, community organizations of all kinds, multi-ethnic, multi-class. It was really--well, a lot of people--there's a guy named Robert Garcia who's a lawyer, now does something called the City Project, and Robert was real instrumental in bringing in a lot of Latino politicians, and we did not have a lot of support from the Latino community. I mean, people--word really came back, because the city cast it as jobs versus the environment, and you know, people like Cathedral High School's principal, and Father what's-his-name [Gregory J.] Boyle, not Boyle, the guy that runs Homeboy Industries?

Collings

I know who you mean.

MacAdams

Yes, these guys were all totally opposed to there being a park there. But you know, but Robert kept working. But it was a hard slog, and really the first Latino politician to really commit to what we were doing was Antonio Villaraigosa. We went and met with him one day, and we were white, brown, black, and he saw that. He saw that this wasn't just a bunch of white guys from the suburbs trying to tell people in the central city what to do. And once he signed on, other people signed on.

Collings

So why did he sign on?

MacAdams

I think, you know, I mean you could imagine a cynical reason, he wanted to reach out into the white world. But the fact was, Ed Roski, the developer, was a big campaign donor to him, and he lost that money from Roski. Roski pulled his money from him. So I think there was a level of just like this was the right thing to do. I really do feel that way. I didn't feel cynical about it at the time, and I still don't, you know. I feel like he decided that this was important, that the city needed parks, and he was a powerful state assemblyman. And it was not just him, but Tom Hayden was very involved. Tom had always been involved, and Tom is kind of, it's always a mixed blessing working with Tom, because, you know, he has so many enemies, many of which he doesn't deserve, and some which he certainly made for himself. But we would not have succeeded if Tom was our only supporter, by any means.

MacAdams

But after Antonio, Gloria Molina got involved, and Palanco and everybody. I mean, it became like a good thing, positive thing to do, and through the NRDC

[National Resources Defense Council], which at that time I didn't know, their play on The Cornfield and the Taylor Yard was backed by Lauren [Bon], I mean through the Annenberg Foundation. She was--

Collings

Now, the fact that it was also going to be, in essence, an artwork, was that--

MacAdams

That wasn't there at all at that point. I didn't think it was there even in Lauren's mind at that point, as far as I know. I mean, I didn't know her at that point, and I didn't even know she was involved. This was totally quiet. I didn't find out this till Lauren and I started going out. It was just strictly a major-league political battle, and it got the [L.A.] Times supporting us. You know, we just fought. It was just a classic situation. And we were able through the NRDC and through Bobby [Robert F.] Kennedy, Jr., to get HUD to withdraw the money that they were going to give, and that was another big blow, and that was really totally about connections. I mean, Bobby Kennedy is real close to the NRDC, and Joel Reynolds and I met with him, and he went back to his then brother-in-law, Andrew Cuomo, was the head of HUD at the time, and suddenly the money wasn't there anymore, you know.

MacAdams

You know, we did everything. It was one of those situations that are quite rare, in my experience, where you really--you know, the things broke, all the things broke the right way. It was just like one of those, you know, sometimes you're on the side of history, and sometimes you're not, and we were totally on that one, and the Taylor Yard, too. It was a different kind of political situation, but it was that we were on the right side of history, I mean, because people want parks.

MacAdams

I mean the real interesting battle to come, and I don't know if it's going to come in my lifetime, but, is over the Piggyback Yard, the Union Pacific's intermodal yard, which is right across the river from the MTA building. That's about 140 acres and about three-quarters of a mile riverfront, and that's still a very active yard, and we're starting--well, we've been for a couple of years, I mean, we're calling it now the Central City Initiative, and it involves putting the railroad tracks underground, and convincing or forcing, whatever comes first, the Union Pacific to move that yard, move their activities out of that yard, and sell it to the public. But it's different, because the other two were basically defunct yards. This one is still pretty active.

Collings

Now, could you foresee some pressure coming from whatever community would be receiving Union Pacific on the other end, if they were to move out of that yard?

MacAdams

Well, they have moved--all of that area, all their other railroad yards are shut down, because--I think this battery's not doing too good--the other yards, all the stuff has moved out to Colton and San Bernardino area. Like if you ever go along the 10 [freeway], where these vast railroad yards are out there, that's--they're going around the city. They're going around urban Los Angeles, because basically there's not a big--you know, it's like that's why all these tracks were done to downtown, because there's no more industry downtown. But what it is like you go around the city, and then you go out there, and then it spreads out all over the country from there. So that's what we hope this will happen. I mean, they're not anywhere near there yet, you know, but eventually they will, and eventually the tracks will be underground, and I'm just trying to push it along as much as I can.

MacAdams

So we'll see, but there hasn't even been any meetings. I mean, dealing with the railroads is incredibly difficult, because there's only a few of them, and they control--you know, I mean the Union Pacific basically, there's two railroads west of the Mississippi anymore. I guess a United States senator can get their attention, but I guarantee you no mayor can, or city council person, or even county supervisor can, so that's a big battle.

MacAdams

I mean, when we dealt with The Cornfield and the Taylor Yard, I never met anybody from the railroads. At the very beginning I went, went Southern Pacific still owned the yards, I went to San Francisco when their headquarters were still up there, and met with some guy that just was politely shining me on. But other than that, we never met with a railroad person, you know, which is sort of amazing really. We dealt through--essentially, who came along to sort of facilitate the compromises, which were in effect, I mean the developers all made out like bandits, because they got top dollar when the state bought the land. I mean, that's why it's so expensive. I mean, you know, the state paid something like \$800,000 an acre for the Taylor Yard, and like \$900,000 an acre for The Cornfield, and I mean, that adds up.

MacAdams

There's a law firm that has a very powerful--Latham and Watkins, which is in the library tower, is a very powerful land-use component, and George Mihilsten and Bill Delvac, two of their land-use attorneys, were really the people that actually did the real leg work to make this compromise happen. They're people that are, they just--I mean, one of the things until you see how little effect the planning department has. I mean, the planning department was not even a factor in this whole thing. I don't think we ever met with anybody from the planning department. Now it's changed slightly, because Villaraigosa is a little

more planning-friendly, and Gail Goldberg, who's the head of the planning department is a very active, dynamic person. So it's a little different now, but then they just weren't even a factor, nor was [City of Los Angeles Department of] Parks and Rec[reation].

MacAdams

It was totally about the state and the federal government and the developers, and dealing with the developers. So anyway, but it was definitely part of our mission. I mean, you see all over the country people talking about these emerald necklaces, you know, that are like the Charles River and stuff like that in Boston, Cambridge, so I was sort of trying--it didn't catch on [unclear] the emerald tennis bracelet, you know, but it was too much of a Beverly Hills type of joke, I guess.

Collings

Yes. And emerald isn't really [unclear] color.

MacAdams

Yes, it's true. It hasn't worked at all. I mean, greenway works okay. So eventually those parks came into being. And you know, the way we got those parks really was started with the much smaller pocket parks of the Trust for Public Land, and Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and Northeast Trees really did along the river in Frogtown area, Elysian Valley area, because I mean, I think I've said it before, but until you--you know, people if they can't see it, it's hard for people to act on it. So you start with these little tiny parks, and people go, "Oh, those are nice. Those work. God, I mean, we could actually have a little fifty-or-sixty-by-a-hundred park in our neighborhood." And then that allows you to think on a larger scale, a regional-park scale, like The Cornfield and the Taylor Yard.

MacAdams

And I think that those parks coming into existence and becoming parts of communities allows you to think about something like this, the Piggyback Yard, which is like, that one's very difficult because it's so invisible, you know. You can't really see it from anywhere. I mean, it's like you can't see the river downtown, because there's railroad tracks on both sides. The railroad yards, those big yards are between the river, which is totally inaccessible, and San Fernando Road, and the San Fernando Road is built up on both sides, so you can't even see the yard. I mean, I take people up on top of the garage for the police, the police garage for the Twin Towers, which I do with the--I guess this won't be probably public for a while, but I use a fake press card that I used to have, that I just cut off the date on, and you know, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, depends on who's guarding the police garage. But I mean, you have to go up like go up on the top floor there. It's the only place just about you can even see this yard in its entirety.

MacAdams

I mean, one of the things, I have a meeting for lunch with is finishing up a grant to the Warhol Foundation to try to do some art projects that bring attention to this yard, a huge light piece that's going to illuminate the yard is one of them, and a big trompe l'oeil painting that's another, of the river with the day that the Europeans arrived, which is another one we want to do. So I mean that's sort of like my major, what I'm focusing on. I mean, I'm focusing on everything, too, but the things that really--I just feel like I want to try to do the downtown stuff.

MacAdams

And it's also important because we're trying to create, you know, a financial constituency for the river. I mean, we don't have those advantages that Heal the Bay and TreePeople does, which is being in wealthy communities the river doesn't run through.

Collings

Well, talking about the art, I mean there's The Cornfield, you said that it didn't start out as an art piece, but when it became an art piece it was sort of a conceptual piece in a way.

MacAdams

Yes. Well, I thought of it as totally an extension of--you know, and Lauren will argue with this, I guarantee you, but I saw it as very much an extension of what we'd done before, and a justification for it, and a really brilliant way to think about art. You know, and it goes back. I mean, the work of Joseph Beuys is very important both to Lauren and I, and one of her real teachers is a guy named Manuel Castells, who teaches in the [University of Southern California] Annenberg School of Communication. He's like, you know, he teaches one semester. He's a Spaniard. Castells is also a very influential thinker about how communities move. I actually use a little quote from him at the beginning of the pamphlet, the D-Town Visions pamphlet.

MacAdams

And I met him. I never had heard of him till Lauren introduced us, and he's a very impressive mind. But Beuys' work and his idea of social sculpture is really central to what I think, and increasingly so as I study Beuys more. I'm actually teaching a class at Naropa [University], the Buddhist university this summer, called "Social Sculpture 101," which is about Joseph Beuys and about how that has influenced my work on the L.A. River. And you know, saying that FOLAR is a forty-year artwork to bring the river back to life, most people just roll their eyes, especially on our board. But part of a grant that we got from the Annenberg Foundation was to allow me to be the Joseph Beuys Director of FOLAR, which would refocus on issues that artists use, and how changes culture.

MacAdams

So we've been doing--there's a number of things, from making sure all our publications are visually attractive, to, we just finished and it's about to go up the first of April, a one-minute trailer about the river in all the Laemmle Theaters, that they'll show before for six weeks, before our river cleanup, which actually we're not sure it's going to happen, because Gloria Molina is threatening to stop us from doing the cleanup because of this whole controversy over the murals, the freestyle, the meeting of style.

MacAdams

You know, and I'm not sure, I mean because Lauren and I don't really speak anymore, but she probably would put down my understanding of Beuys because, the way I see Beuys is a ways different than the way she sees Beuys' influence, and Beuys' influence is so vast that there's a million ways you could see his work. Not a Cornfield was an amazing embodiment of his ideas. Then things that I do, they may not have that kind of a sweep, but you know, on the other hand, Lauren spent three million dollars doing that piece, so, you know, I don't have that kind of ability.

Collings

Of her own money?

MacAdams

Annenberg money. The truth--oh, well, I don't know the truth, because I'm not privy to all that, never was, but the Annenberg Foundation is basically made up of Lauren's mom, Lauren, and two of her three brothers. One of her brothers is mentally incapable. But that's the Annenberg Foundation, and they're all extremely comfortable, but they're all far from the wealthiest people in the world or even Los Angeles. I mean, most of the money in the Annenberg trusts go to the Annenberg Foundation, and Lauren has a sort of an offshoot of it that controls, called the Blue Planet Initiative. So you know, most of that money, I don't think it came from Lauren personally. I don't mean she doesn't have that kind of money, but the Annenberg Foundation has major--

Collings

She can command it.

MacAdams

Yes, exactly. So I can't do things on that level, and I don't know if I--you know, and Lauren is really a brilliant woman and a great artist, and I don't know, I don't think of myself quite that way. But so I have to do sort of smaller--but I have to get the right projects, the projects that have their own, like The Cornfield, like the battle for The Cornfield, you know, we had to have history on our side. We can't turn history. We're not that powerful.

MacAdams

So there have to be a lot of different things aiming to turn a project, like the Piggyback Yards. You know, first is to get them into the public consciousness,

and so that's involving now what we're trying--this guy who does giant light projections. We want to light it up so people can see it, and close down the Cesar Chavez Bridge so it becomes a viewing platform for an evening, you know, and then have DJs and make it a big public event. That's one of the things we're applying to this Warhol Foundation grant for.

MacAdams

One of the most interesting projects that Joseph Beuys ever did was a thing called "Seven Thousand Oaks," in which he had 7,000 basalt columns sort of spread in front of a giant, of a museum, and 7,000 oak trees that needed to be planted in, around the town of Kassel, where the Documenta is a big art festival. So as each one of the trees would find a place, the basalt would be next to it, and it would say who had donated the trees. It took them six years, but eventually they finished this. They got all the basalt off the lawn and into the ground, and all the oak trees planted. That's a work that has always intrigued me.

MacAdams

And a work of Robert Smithson's that has equally intrigued me was a work that he was never able to build, because he died very young in a plane crash. But it was a work that he was doing, planning with a copper mine company called Bingham [Canyon] Mine in, I forget, Idaho? I can't remember, but somewhere in the west-northwest, in which they would take the tailings from this vast, three-mile-across copper mining pit, and make them into kind of an omega shape at the bottom of this pit, so that he would be turning ecology into art, or some combination of ecology and art on a geological scale, and reclaiming land as an artwork. That's a work that's always really been interesting to me, like Beuys' work, where you are working on a grand scale, and I think that that's one of the things that attracts me about the river is that it really feeds my megalomania.

MacAdams

I mean, we have to--it's always, at the same time it's retail, taking people down to the river one by one ala our river cleanups, and at the same time it's also a grand project on an immense scale. One of the ways that I wanted to bring attention to the railroad yard, I decided a couple of years ago, I'd been thinking about it, was to do some kind of a big mural on the river next to the yard, and through my son Torii [MacAdams], my seventeen-year-old, who's follows hip-hop and graffiti and all the contemporary pop arts really closely, he took me over to this gallery called Crewest Gallery, which is just a few blocks from here on Main Street, and it's run by a guy named Man 1.

MacAdams

Man 1 is about in his mid-thirties, kind of grew up in the graffiti movement, is now a married guy with three kids, and a very, very, very, very together person,

and really an admirable person. And when I met him, I knew that he would be a great person to collaborate with. So we decided that we were going to do--we found the site that we wanted, and it was going to be a giant mural that would be in three parts. One was on the side of a warehouse which backed up to the river, one was on a railroad embankment, which was the siding that used to go to that warehouse, then the third part was on the channel walls right below that.

MacAdams

We enlisted--we agreed to do it with FOLAR and Crewest, and then we enlisted a youth-marketing company called Hadley McRoberts, promised that they would raise the money to this project. It was between the Cezar Chavez [Blvd.] Bridge, and the 101 Freeway bridge. It was going to be probably the largest mural ever painted. It was going to be images--it was going to bring together a lot of things within, and they were all going to do images of what this railroad yard could look like when it was done.

MacAdams

And we couldn't raise the money. I don't know whether it was Hadley McRoberts, that they weren't as good as they said they were, or the project just wasn't commercial, had any commercial viability. We couldn't raise the money, and so our board said, "We've got to stop." We had already purchased a bunch of spray paint that we'd gotten a deal on, but spent like \$15,000 on, and our board was like, "We can't do this. We have to stop." So we had to stop.

MacAdams

But we had been working closely enough with them that, you know, I felt really guilty, because they had--Man 1 is part of an organization called Meeting of Styles, which is an international group of graffiti painters, mostly European, and they were going to come to be part of this thing, and all these guys had already bought tickets, and he said, "We've got to find something for them to paint." And so I said, "Okay, well, let's go out and drive around." He said he wanted to do it in the river. I said, "Well, okay, this is your deal, but I'll help you figure out a site." So we drove around and he figured out a site, which was interesting because it was at the confluence of the Arroyo Seco and the Los Angeles River, which is exactly where I started FOLAR, and it's an incredibly degraded place. I mean, it's utterly invisible from anyplace, and it's filled with, you know, human shit and hypodermic needles and burnt out cars. I mean, it's just, you know, it's a horrible place.

MacAdams

And he said, "Let's paint it here." And so I said, "That's a good idea. Fine. That's okay with me. This is your deal." And then we donated--they had a gallery opening of art about the Los Angeles River, and we donated money for pizza and soft drinks and were very supportive of it, but we didn't have--the permits weren't in our name, because the insurance wasn't in our name. We

didn't choose the artists. You know, we didn't have anything to do with it really, except to say, "We love it."

MacAdams

So the event, I wasn't even in town when the event actually happened, because it was supposed to happen a week earlier, and then it rained, and so this was like last September. But I saw it a few days later in [unclear] reports. I saw it online. It was a huge deal. It was like a thousand people showed up to paint. It's like 200 crews, and it was like a quarter of a mile long on both sides of the river, and we thought, everybody that was connected with it thought it was a fantastic event. The murals were amazing. Some of them were actually about the river. They were all over the place. I mean, some of them were just real abstract lettering, some of them were cartoons, you know, just all kinds of things.

MacAdams

Then about a week after this happened we get a call from Gloria Molina's office, the supervisor, and somebody says, "The supervisor wants to meet you, and she'll be at your office in an hour." You know, which is just--you know, I'd never heard, you can't even get a meeting with this woman. The supervisors are basically for life, you know, there's no terms limits, and there's never been a sitting supervisor that's been defeated in fifty years. So her showing up at our office--so you know, I called Man 1. I wasn't at the office. Shelly, our executive director, called me and told me what was happening. I called Man 1, I said, "We should be here, this is extraordinary."

MacAdams

And Man's not political. He doesn't really, didn't even know how amazing this was. So we show up and this woman storms in with four or five other people, and I mean really storms in. I mean, she was loaded for bear. It was just nasty. She was insulting to our people. She could not have been cruder and angrier, and just it was a horrible meeting. And you know, she demanded that we paint over the mural, that one of the paintings was a cartoon of a Chicana with big tits, you know. She was like, I remember one of the things she said, that, "You're doing your fiesta tomorrow night. Why don't you get T-shirts painted up that have Friends of the Los Angeles River and have a pair of tits on them?" You know, that's the level that it was.

MacAdams

It was just like, I can't believe this supervisor's saying like this. She doesn't know any of these people here, and I hardly knew her. I had no bad relationship with her, no particularly good--I think we'd given her a [inaudible] actually, at one of our awards things for something she'd done. But I mean, you know, she'd never supported us financially. She never had anything really to do with FOLAR, other than nothing really. So it was just a complete shock, the whole

thing, and she treated Man 1 like a criminal, you know, and basically her beef was that any art in the river is not art by definition, that it's graffiti, it's tagging, it brings gangsters down to the river, people will get killed over this. You know, it's just so millions of miles from the truth, but, in fact, a lot of people think that.

MacAdams

And she was blaming us, because--and this is the mysterious part. You know, why she was blaming us still remains mysterious to me. But anyway she does, and she demanded that we paint over the mural, and not only did we know that it was illegal to just paint over a mural, that California has a law, you've got to have ninety-day notice, you've got to try to contact the artist, all this stuff. Not only that, but it wasn't our project. I mean, all we did was give \$300 for pizza. You know, so we said, "No, we're not going to paint it over." And the meeting was just horrible. And finally Gerry Hertzberg, her chief of staff, says, "This is the worst meeting I've ever attended." And I said, "I feel exactly the same way, and it's over." And I stood up and I said to Molina, "Friends of the Los Angeles River is going to be here a long time after you're gone." And it was a great closing line, but it pissed her off big time. And I'm not sure that's the only reason for the vendetta, but I'm sure it's one of them.

MacAdams

But it was already there. She had said to Gerry Hertzberg at this meeting, "Make sure FOLAR never gets a permit to do anything in the river ever again." So we haven't been able to get a permit yet for our, the spring cleaning. And one of the things that I did was, as part of the Beuys professorship, was this one-minute trailer, which ends telling people, May seventeenth, L.A. River cleanup.

Collings

Oh, dear.

MacAdams

So, we're trying, we've been trying to negotiate. I mean, there's a million ramifications. The county decided that because the murals--other people showed up hearing about it that weren't invited, and so there were extensions further upstream. There were people doing their own murals. I mean, I didn't have any problem with that, but the county felt that that had violated the permit, which, in fact, it didn't legally, but they just said, well, this wasn't the original thing, people were working--you know, and Man 1 had done everything. People had showed up to paint days later, and the cops had showed up, and Man said, "No, we were only doing this for two days. These people are not, this is not part of the permit." Man was impeccable about it, cleaned up. Everything was totally cleaned up after; there wasn't a spray-can nozzle left down there.

Collings

Just out of curiosity, what if the murals had not been done in the kind of like graffiti-type, you know, sort of internationalist, I suppose, like that style? What if it had been abstract expressionism or something?

MacAdams

You know, it's a good question, because there are so many different elements to this thing. I mean, there's class issues.

Collings

I mean, what if it was Monet's Water Lilies all down the river?

MacAdams

Yes, exactly, you know. That's why I think that there's a lot of class issues. The people that were painting out there that day were guys you know, with white socks up to their knees.

Collings

Yes. Before you were talking about boys and The Cornfield, and this light installation, and that's very different.

MacAdams

Right. Yes. Exactly. And I'm totally proud of what we did, but it just has caused incredible hassles. I mean, four of our board members resigned over it, because they felt threatened in their own--there were a couple of them, three of them were consultants in various ways on county projects, and Molina, I mean Molina called other supervisors to tell them not to give money to FOLAR, led a boycott of our fiesta, and hardly any politicians showed up this year, and has been--any way she can fuck us up, she's been following out up to this point, up to today.

MacAdams

So anyway, so this other "graffiti," quote, unquote--I mean, it depends how, if you say tagging it's one thing, graffiti it's another thing, murals it's another in people's minds. So people were doing other murals on their own, and you know, some of them were really talented, but man, most of them were kind of crude, but they were all right. I mean, they were just as good as most things in the river. But Man had brought out all the top crews in town, so the level was very high in what was actually happening that weekend.

MacAdams

So the county was saying, "Well, it's your fault," because they still weren't getting that we, FOLAR, had nothing to do with this, and none of the permits were in our name. So we said--we were trying to make peace in this meeting, and I said, "Okay, tell you what. We'll paint out the graffiti that's showed up since the mural was finished." So we thought we had an agreement to that as fact. Then it turns out that--so we had a big meeting down at the river with FOLAR, the County Public Works, the Supervisors Office. We made an agreement to paint over--very specific, it was laid out, here's where you need

paint over, this here, here, here. We agreed to do it, and we said we would get bids on it.

MacAdams

We start out. First thing that happens is we find out that Molina has nixed this deal, because she wants us to paint over graffiti eternally, not just one time.

Collings

Paint over it what?

MacAdams

Eternally.

Collings

Oh, eternally. Oh. Oh, I see.

MacAdams

Yes, not just one time. So I call up this guy Hertzberg and I say, "You know, we seem to have a little disagreement here, between one time and infinity, and there's got to be some kind of compromise in between those numbers that we can work with and live with." And the guy says, "Yes." And then the next thing I know--and there's starting to be more and more press about it. I mean, the Times hasn't done a big deal about it, but Associated Press did a huge television thing, Univision did a thing, the magazine Ciudad did a thing, all these blogs, really, and suddenly one entire wall is painted over, spray painted over, clearly done by a contractor that had nothing to do, and immediately that is just attacked by taggers, you know, and people, just hundreds of tags show up within hours of that, almost as if it were organized.

MacAdams

And these people did a really shitty job spray painting it, and the country won't take credit for it, claim they didn't have anything to do with it. It obviously was done with a spray-paint truck, because, you know, it was a big space done very fast. So we agreed to paint out all this other graffiti that they didn't touch on this thing. They just painted out a bunch of mural, half, the upstream side of the whole mural. So we agreed to do that, and so Hertzberg and I agreed, "We'll do this one time, and then let's talk about it, let's see, go on from there."

MacAdams

The next thing we know, two days later the county goes ahead and paints out--one of their contractors goes ahead and paints out all the graffiti, and they send us a bill. And not only did we already have a bid for \$4200, they sent us a bill for \$6600, which is what they paid. I mean, the county pays like \$40 million a year for graffiti abatement, none of it, generally speaking, in the river, till this particular--so we got this bill, and then we have ninety days, which is April first is when the ninety days is up, to paint over the mural. Basically, you know, they want us to paint over the mural, or they're going to do it and charge us for it.

MacAdams

And we said, basically, "Hey, this isn't our--." They have no legal right. I mean, there's nothing in our name. You know, they can't do that. But it's a political issue. Legally they've got no rights. So whether Man 1 wants to paint it out, or leave it to be painted out, it's up to him. I mean, he and I have talked. I don't think they're going to paint it out. I'm almost certain they're not going to paint it out. So we're going to be facing a much, much larger bill for doing that, and we're not going to pay it.

MacAdams

In the meantime, I don't know what we're going to do about the river cleanup, you know. We're in the river on various other projects, and we're just basically doing it without permits, but to have 3500 people down at the river, and Molina saying, "Well, we'll do our own cleanup." And our board is really divided. I mean, we've never been in a situation like this. You know, we're used to being if not always the fair-haired boys and girls, at least people deal with us as if we're actually trying to do something positive, whether our methods are as good as our motives. You know, we have sued. We sued the county ten years ago, which is what led to, really, the whole change in how county, even the Corps deal with the river.

MacAdams

But this is a whole different thing. I mean, this doesn't get us or anybody anywhere, so we'll see. I mean, one of the things I want to do if I can get this Warhol grant is to do a symposium on public art in the river, you know, because it's all about access to the river, just like the city is now ticketing fly fishermen on a municipal loitering code. Now two cases have just been thrown out of court in the last few days, so. You know, it's like it's okay to paint pretty pictures and to make plans, but people are actually using the river for various things, like painting murals, like fly fishing, like a band set up, rented a generator, set up and do a concert, and they were shut down after about twenty minutes. All these fly fishermen are doing catch and release of the carp in the river, and they're getting ticketed, because there's no fishing ban in the river. They're using a loitering municipal code, which like I said, judges have thrown out twice in the last few days.

MacAdams

So I mean the access to the river issue is the real cutting-edge issue, and right now FOLAR is a little frightened about it, because of the whole Molina thing. And I don't know how it's going to turn out. I mean, you know, I mean I think she wants to destroy Friends of the Los Angeles River. I have no doubt about it actually, and I'm certainly not going to go down without fighting over that. We'll see. It's just time will tell just who has fell, you know.

MacAdams

But I think that the murals is kind of a side issue in a way. I mean, it's a big deal because of Molina, but it's all about access. It's all about actually using the river. I mean, it's like you're allowed to go into Griffith Park, even though you could fall off a cliff, yet that somehow has been able to work out the liability. I mean, the river is like the ocean. It's like the beach, you know. These are public--this is public space, and how that's going to work out, I mean this is the painful rubber-hits-the-road period. And it's really bugging me that we're still hung up in this thing with Molina, because we should be leading this fight, and now the fight is being kind of--I'm sort of angry, because I mean, this is my favorite part, you know, which is kind of like tweaking the powers that be, you know, saying no to power, and it's sort of being led by disciples of mine.

MacAdams

I mean, I don't know if you've ever seen Nature Trumps [blog], which is the L.A. River blog. You know, Jay Babcock is kind of leading the fight, him and a guy named Carmelo Gaetano, who's a fisherman, and they're guys in their early thirties. I guess it's just the evolution, you know, and time, that I'm feeling kind of envious of them right now.

Collings

Well, it's another struggle over which community controls this space, because you were saying about the struggle over the ethnicity, the monuments to the various ethnicities that had founded the [unclear].

MacAdams

Well, the truth is that nobody--I mean, so much of the river has been neglected that in ownership it's--you know, like this whole thing with Universal [Studios] and the bike path. I don't know if you noticed that a couple of days ago. Universal doesn't want the L.A. River bike path to go along the river past Universal. They want it to go all the way up the hill to the top, because they want to avoid the bike path going by the bungalow where Steven Spielberg's office is.

Collings

I see.

MacAdams

And they actually had the amazing gall to say, "Well, we're worried about people throwing scripts over the fence to Spielberg." I mean, can you believe that? I mean, this was a serious, this was like their public relations; you know, it's just insane. But I mean again, it's about access, or it's again everybody's cool with the river restoration master plan and the pretty pictures, but the people have moved fast and moved ahead of it. And it's what we've been doing from day one, bringing people down to the river. That was from the beginning, I mean, the day I cut the fence and declared the river open. Now people are

starting to hear that, and finally it's gone way beyond me, even beyond FOLAR, people doing it on their own, which is the right thing to do.

MacAdams

But I don't know how, I mean, FOLAR, I mean, I don't know what's going to be the outcome. It's a very serious issue for our organization. I mean, we were willing to pay \$4200, but we're certainly not going to pay 15,000 or whatever. And they already painted it out, so why should we even pay? We didn't make an agreement with them to paint it out. You know, I've talked to a number of lawyers, and again it's something, I mean, there's nothing that we can win by going to court. I mean, we're still going to have the supervisor that wants to destroy FOLAR, you know, I mean so we've got to somehow find a way to end this, but it isn't clear yet what it's going to be.

MacAdams

Because she doesn't want it to end. She wants to destroy FOLAR, I think. So I don't know what else we can talk about. I mean, D-Town Visions, it's about half about the river, but it's also, I mean it's a number of things. I mean, I want to talk about the whole of the larger community, too.

Collings

D-Town Visions, [reads] building a city the river can be proud of.

MacAdams

Yes, and this is just the first. We're going to do another pamphlet on what we're calling the Park District, which is between The Cornfield and the river, and all the issues around there, which are talked about here, but I want to go into more depth on that. Yes, and then we're going to do the third one about the railroad yards and the railroads along the river, and really in depth about how you can actually--because up to now, nobody has spent any real time, and the NRDC is willing to pay me to do it, so hopefully that'll be something in the next year or two that I'll be doing.

Collings

Do you think you want to talk about the book that you've published called The River, the book of poems?

MacAdams

Well, The River, I mean when I started FOLAR, as I know I said, I've always lived on the cusp of poetry and politics, and it took me a long time to be able to write poems about the river. Then when I was able to begin to write poems about the river, I was only able to do it in sort of small pieces, and eventually was able to build up enough--I mean, I have another book like this, called News From Niman Farm, which is a long poem about the early days of Bill Niman's Niman Ranch beef, which I lived in his hog barn and talked about, I think.

MacAdams

And *The River* is a kind of similar technique, of just building up from small particulars, like William Carlos Williams, the quote at the beginning, and you know, it's just a--I mean, I have written other kinds of work, like the stuff I'm doing for *Day to Day*, that NPR show, is about downtown. I mean, the conceit is things that happen within fifty feet of my front door, but it's kind of expanded to just be around downtown, about the life in the streets, more or less. It doesn't particularly--I don't think any of them have actually even talked about that, I've done maybe somewhere of fifteen to twenty, I can't remember how many. But I don't think any of them are about the river.

MacAdams

I'm not good at being--I don't like to be pigeonholed, and I don't like when people assume they can assume things about me. And for a while, sort of in homage to Joseph Beuys, Beuys always wore this fedora, and for a while I was doing the same. Then people started to--when I didn't have a hat on, people would say, "Oh, where's your hat?" I mean, and I see why Beuys did it, was because it was just a way to kind of--well, I mean, I'm sure it was more than one thing, but it was a way to sort of, this was like his signature almost, when he would do a performance. He would be there in this fedora and this kind of hunting jacket.

MacAdams

You know, but I didn't ever want to have a persona that people could think they understood what it was. I just never--I'm more of a trickster, I hope, than that. And so *The River*, even though it started out to be the poem of my life, you know, sort of that part of my life, the second part of my life maybe, I mean it's now three books long. I want to do two more books, and then it will be done, I guess, but I haven't even begun doing Book Four. I mean, it's already gone into a second edition. I mean, it actually has sold quite a few copies, you know, just mostly almost entirely in L.A., because people have some little recognition.

MacAdams

I don't know what else to say about it. I mean, what Gary Snyder said on the back of the second edition was all I could have ever hoped for as a poet, which to have that kind of praise from somebody on that level, who's really one of my teachers, mentors, examples, although I could never, obviously, do what Gary's done. But I mean, the work continues. I mean, it hasn't slowed down.

MacAdams

I mean, I think that I've had to battle a lot in myself in terms of, you know, writing and politics, and trying to figure out how to do one and then the other, and no doubt it's slowed down my work on this biography of Jann Wenner, which is, you know, a major work that's probably taken seven or eight years. But I mean, that's central to me. I mean, we're not here to talk about that, but I mean that's what I do, four or five hours every day, and its central concern is

writing basically a cultural history of the last fifty or sixty years, and writing about a central figure, who people don't necessarily realize has been such a central figure.

MacAdams

You know, so that's all of a piece. I mean, my writing is essentially all of a piece. I mean the D-Town Visions piece, which I love the pamphlet form, I mean I get paid well for it, but it seems really old fashioned in a way, and they've distributed maybe 1500 copies, which would be fairly large if it was a poem, and I don't know, 1500 copies in a watershed of fifteen million, but it's going to people that actually, generally speaking, have some say or some sway, and I mean, it's an interesting, for me, experiment in what I am as a writer, you know, as a polemicist or propagandist.

MacAdams

But I'm a lot of different things as a writer, and I want to keep exploring them, really. I mean you were here last time when I got this scare, and I mean, that's not over. I'm going to have to continue to deal with that. And the grants that I've been living off of for the last eighteen months are about over, and I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to get money next, and keep a roof over my head. I mean, I have all-- [End of recording at

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