

A TEI Project

Interview of Marcia Hanscom

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (January 4, 2008)

Collings

Today is January 4th, 2008. Jane Collings interviewing Marcia Hanscom at her home.

Collings

So why don't we just start off with the basics of where you came from, something about your family? So where and when were you born?

Hanscom

I was born in Altadena, just north of South Pasadena, which is where my family was living at the time, and where I was mostly raised. We lived in Azusa for about a year in between there, West Covina. But most of the time growing up I lived in South Pasadena, and so have been in and around Los Angeles for a long time.

Collings

Yes. Were your family like native Californians or had they come out from the Midwest, perhaps?

Hanscom

My father's family is East Coast, Connecticut, Massachusetts based, and I've, in fact, met very few of his family because of that. My mother's family, however, is a third-generation Californian, so--she was third-generation, so they had long ties to the community here.

Collings

Do you have brothers and sisters?

Hanscom

I have two sisters [Nancy, and Janice Hanscom-Echevarria, now Ransom].
They don't live in the area any longer.

Collings

What kind of community did you grow up in? What kind of community was Altadena at that time?

Hanscom

South Pasadena is actually where I grew up. Altadena, I was in the hospital, but that's about it.

Collings

Oh yes.

Hanscom

In South Pasadena it was a very quiet community, sort of a, well, small bedroom community of Los Angeles, very close to Los Angeles, right on the border, but it was a very small town, and I rarely ventured out of South Pasadena, except to visit my grandmother [Patti Dennison] at Redondo Beach, which is where I, I think, first had my love for the coast sort of nurtured.

Collings

Sure. Yes.

Hanscom

We would go there almost every weekend.

Collings

How nice, yes, and you would go swimming.

Hanscom

Yes, swimming and playing in the sand and looking at all of the little animals and things in the shoreline area.

Collings

So there were tide pools around there?

Hanscom

Yes. Well, not tide pools, but just in the ocean waves there. No, it's a sandy beach at Redondo, but it was much different than it is today.

Collings

Yes, I can imagine. Yes, that must have been really nice. So what kinds of things did your parents do?

Hanscom

My father was a janitor at the post office in South Pasadena. He had been in World War II, had been an almost twenty-year navy veteran--

Collings

Oh, my gosh.

Hanscom

--and because of the trauma he experienced--

Collings

Oh, dear.

Hanscom

--during the war, when he came back, he worked in government jobs, and so the post office was where he was working most of the time while I was growing up. My mother also was a government employee. She worked for the Internal Revenue Service and then the Social Security Administration.

Collings

What were their political views?

Hanscom

Well, that's interesting you ask, because I just had a discussion with my mother about that over the holidays, and she informed me that she's a staunch conservative Republican now. I was a little surprised. She was a Democrat when I was growing up, and my father was a Republican, so they had interesting conversations. But I don't think it was really the political parties that influenced me as much as was their attitude toward how one would go about getting things done. Like when my father did not receive his paycheck or his Veterans Administration check or something was awry, he would be immediately on the phone to the senator or to the White House [Collings laughs] or, you know, he just believed in going to the top, which is something that I think I learned from him.

Collings

Oh, that's interesting. Yes. Well, he probably felt like, you know, having served in the military all those years, that he was entitled.

Hanscom

Yes, well, and it worked, and I watched that process, and so went, "Hmm, start at the top. Why go through all this bureaucracy?"

Collings

Oh, that's really interesting. Yes. What kinds of things do your sisters do?

Hanscom

Well, one of my sisters is living up in Marysville, and I believe--I'm not in great touch with my sisters these days, but I believe she is doing some kind of clerical work for a real estate agent or something like that, something for housing mortgages; I'm not really clear on that. My other sister is--she's kind of lost, shall we say.

Collings

Yes. So what were your parents sort of talking with you about when you were growing up about, you know, possible jobs in the future and so forth?

Hanscom

You know, I don't know that they really encouraged me to go in any particular way, but my mother was very much a strong believer that I could do anything I wanted, and I got a lot of confidence instilled in me from her, I believe. I was

the oldest, and she just always considered that I could do anything. So there was no question that anything is possible.

Collings

What kinds of subjects did you enjoy when you were in high school?

Hanscom

Well, I hated English. It turned out that now I consider myself a very good writer, but I didn't like it then. I'm not sure why. I pretty much was into--well, Spanish. I took all the Spanish classes so that I became fluent in Spanish. I had excellent teachers in that area. I also really was pretty much just making sure I was in the top of my class so that I could get into college. That was a big deal. My mother had gone to college but never finished. My father didn't go to college. so it was a really important thing. In fact, our community was very much college prep all the way.

Collings

What college were you trying to get into?

Hanscom

At that time I could have gotten into other colleges, and if I had it to do over, I might. But I was very, very entrenched in the church community that my mother had brought us up in, and so I focused my sights on this small religious college in Indiana, Winona Lake, Indiana, and decided I was going there and put everything else aside. A number of circumstances, once I got there, changed things, and I ended up coming back and going to Pasadena City College and Long Beach City College and then finally getting my degree at Cal State Long Beach. So it wasn't really a path I would have chosen, but it ended up being the best thing, I think.

Collings

Yes. Well, that was kind of a long way to go to head off for college.

Hanscom

Yes, it was, but the church that I was brought up in, I was really brought up in a very fundamental Christian church.

Collings

What is the name of the church? Let me just take your glasses off your mic there, because it might [unclear].

Hanscom

Grace College. Grace Brethren Church is the church, but the college was Grace College.

Collings

This was your mother's church or your father's church?

Hanscom

My mother's church, which she still is entrenched in.

Collings

Just how much of the like church activity would you be involved in?

Hanscom

Well, I played the organ for the church Sunday mornings; sometimes the piano as well. Sang in the choir. I was very involved. Every Sunday morning and Sunday night, Wednesday night. It was really a big part of our lives growing up. My leaving the nest really shifted that for me, and I started questioning a lot of the dogma and doctrine.

Collings

Did the church do, you know, like things for perhaps needy people or organizing any kind of help?

Hanscom

Not so much for the community as much as there were a lot of missionary things to other countries that we were associated with. But not as much as like some churches are here that I see that I would be more interested in today that do get more involved in our own communities. That might be part of what led me to questioning things so much.

Collings

Yes. So when you did go off to college, what were you thinking that you might major in?

Hanscom

Well, originally--I changed my major a number of times. Music was going to be it first. Then I realized how much extra--for a music major you almost have to put in twice as many hours as any other major. It's unbelievable. I finally decided that maybe I would look at something else, so I went to sociology, and then was sort of convinced that that was maybe too big of a picture, and I wanted to maybe help people on a more personal level. So then I decided to major in psychology, and then finally changed to speech communication, communication theory, partly because I ended up with a couple of really interesting professors who became mentors to me, one in particular, Roger van Hook at Long Beach City College.

Collings

Now, when did you start thinking that your vocation would be for helping people?

Hanscom

Well, I mean, I guess that was something that probably was instilled in me in the church.

Collings

So you were at the college in Indiana for just a couple of years and decided to leave, it sounds like.

Hanscom

Well, no, actually, a summer, and it was decided for me. That was another reason that I ended up leaving the church, I believe. I went with a friend. The two of us were going to go to college there together. She was really excited about it. I was really excited about it. One of the grants did not come through that I was anticipating getting; I had a number of scholarships. Unfortunately, that meant that I wouldn't be able to go that semester. So I said, "Well, I'll just work."

Hanscom

My parents lived in South Pasadena, which was a pretty substantial community, but they were not wealthy, and they only had enough to live there so we could go to good schools. But it was just right at the level, apparently, where the grant didn't apply. It was a strange thing.

Hanscom

So I was all prepared to work and maybe go the next semester or even the next year, and just work for a year, saving money. I had worked through the summer there already. The college officials told me I was not allowed to do that. They called me and my friend into the dean's office and had us all pray about it, and at the end of the prayer their decision was to give me this ticket that was going to send me home.

Hanscom

I said, "Well, I don't want to go home. I'll just live off campus and work."

Hanscom

They said, "No, you can't do that."

Collings

You mean they didn't allow students to live off campus?

Hanscom

Well, I wasn't even going to be a student at that point, so it was strange to me, but it was a very controlling church, shall we say. I didn't understand it at all, and, of course, being an eighteen-year-old who had just become an adult, because in California that year they had decided eighteen-year-olds were adults and not twenty-one any longer, that made me even more defiant. But it didn't matter. They didn't really care. They had the ticket, and they were driving me the next morning to Chicago O'Hare Airport, they said. So I came home.

Collings

Wow. Wow.

Hanscom

That pretty much did it for me with that church.

Collings

I see. Was your mother upset when you left the church?

Hanscom

Yes. Yes. I ended up getting married a few years later at that church, but other than that, I didn't really go back.

Collings

Were you concerned about making a living as a music major?

Hanscom

Hadn't thought about it. I was too young to think about that yet, although that might have influenced my decision to change the major. I don't really recall.

Collings

Yes, okay. So up until now your only real association with the sea has been these wonderful weekends at the beach, and your exposure to, shall we say, organizing has been your father's strategies--

Hanscom

Right.

Collings

--of redressing wrongs.

Hanscom

I would say. My mother has obviously a very strong sense of principles as well, and I think I probably got that from her. Even though we might not agree on what those principles might be today, she definitely instilled in me the importance of standing up for what you believe is right, and she still supports what I'm doing because of that.

Collings

Great. That's wonderful. Okay, so you come back out here. You land at LAX. [Laughter] You've been put on a plane in Chicago O'Hare, and what happens next?

Hanscom

Well, like I said, it was so close to the school year by that time I had no choice but to go to Pasadena City College at that point. I couldn't get into anywhere else. I hadn't really even applied anywhere else, even though I had thought about it before, and so that was where I was stuck.

Hanscom

So I went there, and I actually found I liked it and liked the diversity of things, which was very different than in South Pasadena, where we didn't have as much diversity of people or interests. So I went there. Got a little sidetracked a couple of years into it by getting married, a marriage that lasted only a couple of years. But that took me to Long Beach, and then I ended up going to Long Beach City College for a while. My college career ended up being a ten-year college degree, just because of all the various other things happening in life and not knowing really what I wanted to do in terms of a major, changing from here to there.

Collings

I think I've gotten a little lost in terms of the timeline here. So what year would it have been that you started at Pasadena City College?

Hanscom

1972 was the year I graduated from high school. 1975 was when I went back to school at Long Beach City College.

Collings

And what were your views on the women's movement at that time?

Hanscom

I'm not sure I was really aware of it, but I don't ever recall being opposed to it, and at some point in my life was extremely supportive, became supportive. I don't know exactly when that was. But I'm not sure that I was really aware of it that much when I was eighteen.

Collings

Yes, okay. Then you said that you got married shortly thereafter. Were you planning at that time that you would have children and perhaps be a full-time mom and so forth?

Hanscom

I think I sort of hoped that. I was twenty at the time I got married, almost twenty-one. I was sure I would become an old maid if I did not get married. [Laughter] So I did, and it wasn't a good choice, so it didn't last too long. But, yes, I think I thought that, although I always also thought that I would work doing something; I wasn't sure.

Collings

But it wasn't like a single-minded focus on a career at that point.

Hanscom

No, no. No, I mean, when I was thinking of going to Grace College, I really thought I would end up being a minister's wife or a missionary.

Collings

Oh, you did.

Hanscom

So that was a very different thing at that time.

Collings

You were thinking that.

Hanscom

Yes.

Collings

A missionary or a missionary's wife.

Collings

Or a minister's wife.

Collings

A missionary or a minister's wife, okay.

Hanscom

I can't believe I really thought that, but I did. [Laughs]

Collings

Where were you thinking you might be a missionary?

Hanscom

I don't know. You know, somewhere far away. That's where they always lived.
[Laughter]

Collings

Right, okay. Well, that sounds like a really big shift in your thinking then. I mean, this is really huge.

Hanscom

Yes. Well, yes, and thankfully. That's partly why I'm not real close with my sisters any longer, because they're still in that different frame of reference.

Collings

Yes. But, I mean, to go from all of this, you know, sort of support for thinking that, as you said, that you would be a minister's wife or you might be a missionary, to just kind of like heading off to Pasadena City College and not really knowing what's coming next.

Hanscom

Yes, it was very, very much a time of questioning, which often it is at that time of age for young people, I think.

Collings

And society-wide as well.

Hanscom

Yes, and I had it given to me at a point where I wasn't expecting that. I really thought I had this whole pathway in front of me. I worked at a place called Taco Treat, which was a place where a lot of the high school kids worked in South Pasadena, growing up. I went back to work there while I was going to the college, and met some interesting people, including someone who had just gotten back from the Vietnam War. I think that hearing a lot of his stories impacted me quite a bit. I got to know a number of people who were in a very different place than the people I'd grown up with. So I started really kind of looking out into the world a little bit more about what else was out there.

Collings

Yes. And what kinds of things was this co-worker saying about his experiences in Vietnam?

Hanscom

Well, he was obviously very shell-shocked and very disillusioned with a lot of things, and, you know, yet was a very, very nice, gentle spirit. That, of course, made me think a lot about my own father's experience, which had impacted us growing up quite a bit.

Collings

In what way?

Hanscom

Well, he wasn't really there for us emotionally a lot, and in fact, a couple of times had been hospitalized for what they called a nervous condition.

Collings

But now, it was probably--

Hanscom

Clearly, we know it was post-traumatic stress, and they didn't call it that then.

Collings

Right. Right.

Hanscom

All they did then was give people drugs to not really deal with--I don't know if you ever can effectively deal with that sort of trauma.

Collings

I don't, either.

Hanscom

But I don't think the answer is a medicine cabinet full of drugs.

Collings

Yes. What were his views on the Vietnam War?

Hanscom

My dad's views?

Collings

Yes.

Hanscom

I don't think he ever said. He didn't communicate a lot--

Collings

Oh, I see.

Hanscom

--other than when he wanted his check.

Collings

Other than when he wanted his check. [Laughter]

Hanscom

When he had a goal in mind, he went for it, but otherwise he kept a lot of that to himself. He probably talked to me about it more than others, but he was very traumatized by the war. But he never said much at all about Vietnam.

Collings

Did he watch television news?

Hanscom

Oh yes. Yes.

Collings

Of the war.

Hanscom

Yes. But he just never expressed himself much about it.

Collings

Okay. All right. So now it's sounding like you have this kind of almost like a group of informal mentors at the restaurant where you were working.

Hanscom

Yes, a little bit, and a bunch of us would go to San Francisco once in a while and just hang out. I was sort of exploring what else was out there besides South Pasadena.

Collings

Yes. Were you living at home at that time?

Hanscom

For the first six months, yes, but then I moved out quickly.

Collings

And you were able to support yourself, working in the restaurant.

Hanscom

Yes.

Collings

Those were the days, huh? [Laughs]

Hanscom

Yes. Right. Right. Yes. You can't do that much anymore, huh?

Collings

Yes. Okay. Then how did you meet your husband?

Hanscom

The person I married back then?

Collings

Your husband at that time, yes.

Hanscom

I met him at a very good friend's wedding.

Collings

What did he do?

Hanscom

He worked for Channel 2 news. He was like a--I don't know, somebody who helped put on the news.

Collings

Oh yes. That sounds like it would be interesting.

Hanscom

Yes, yes.

Collings

Okay. But you did continue college once you got married.

Hanscom

I actually stopped for a while. I did stop for a while, maybe about six months, and then I kind of went off and on for a couple of years. I just took a couple of classes here and there.

Collings

Did you continue working?

Hanscom

Yes. Yes, my next job, I worked at Huntington Memorial Hospital for a while, and then when I moved to Long Beach, I worked at a hospital in Rossmore. I worked in the dietary department, helping people fill out their menus and that sort of thing.

Collings

Yes, okay. When did you first then become involved with the activities with the coast?

Hanscom

Well, it actually was quite a ways after that, because I sort of--when I got my degree, I finally started working in the communications field. I had a number of jobs in public relations; headed up the alumni association at Cal State Long Beach, and then had my own business for about eight years. So it was later in life that I came to this, really.

Collings

So you developed a lot of those kind of skills then in your professional--

Hanscom

Right. Right. Yes, a lot of my professional skills have been--when I decided to get involved with environmental protection work, I sort of realized there was a need for people with skills like that, and I thought, "Boy, how come things are not so professional here in the nonprofit world?" I was surprised. It's gotten better, much better, but when I started volunteering for the Sierra Club, they didn't even have a flyer that was professionally done. It was very surprising how "by the seat of your pants" people were, and this was just in the early nineties, not that long ago.

Hanscom

So how I got involved is lots of things were happening in my life that were sort of making me think about what I was doing, even though I was on a very fast track in a fast-track world.

Collings

This was with your position with the alumni organization?

Hanscom

No, this was after that and after working for the Chamber of Commerce and then after starting my own business. I had my own business for eight years. It was a public relations special event marketing business, so I had a lot of teams,

Olympic teams that we represented, and bicycle and triathlon events. We would bring sponsors into them and do a lot of that.

Collings

Now, just to backtrack, how did you go from sort of not knowing really what you wanted to do and so forth, into this very organizationally--you know, a lot of organizational skills and working with people? That sounds like another big change.

Hanscom

Yes. Like I said, I had a really good mentor in the communications department at Long Beach City College, Roger van Hook. Then I had several other mentors that, you know, inspired me to go on. My first job, I had been working as a tour guide for the Queen Mary while I was finishing my degree, and became a union shop steward--

Collings

Oh, you did.

Hanscom

--and was speaking up for the tour guides as a Teamster, in fact. During that time we had a new management come in, and they very smartly thought, "Let's offer her a management job." [Laughs] I thought that was a good idea, but I didn't realize they were just trying to get me out of the union.

Collings

So was that your first sort of activist role then, do you think, when you were the shop steward?

Hanscom

No, not my first, but my first in a--well, right after college, when I was still going to Pasadena City College and working at the restaurant, I also was working part-time as a teacher's aide, and I would say that was my first activist experience, because the other aide I was working with there, she and I both realized that the school lunches were a big problem, that they were just giving them--

Collings

Junk.

Hanscom

--junk food, really, and we did some investigation with some support from some of the parents and students, that found out that they were actually giving things that the federal government had said they weren't supposed to even be giving any longer. We opened a whole can of worms and organized people to go to the school district board. So that was really my first activist role, I think.

Hanscom

Then the next probably was--I'm trying to think what we were talking about.

Collings

I just sort of said when you were a shop steward, was that your first activist role.

Hanscom

Yes, as a shop steward, yes, I would say, definitely. I had just been hired when we were voting on whether or not we would be represented by the Teamsters. It wasn't long before I was really very involved with the Teamsters. Then, so what the Wrather Corporation that came in to manage the Queen Mary operation, they said, "Well, you know, we could use an employee communications manager. Maybe you could do that for us, and then you'd still be doing the work you're interested in." I liked that idea, and so I did that for a couple of years until they laid off about half of the staff, including me and my whole department. [Laughter] So that was also a real interesting education.

Collings

In what way?

Hanscom

Well, because I felt like I was really used.

Collings

Yes.

Collings

You shouldn't play with the cord there, sorry.

Hanscom

Oh, sorry.

Collings

In what way?

Hanscom

Because, I mean, here they had told me that what we were doing--well, first of all, they had told me that our department would not be touched, because obviously we were very important to the functioning of the employees there, and in the first round of layoffs, that was the way it was. But then we got all very short notice, you know, that we were all going to be laid off in the next round. They also had just given me this Manager of the Year award a month before, and none of it seemed to mean much at that point. I lived with three roommates, and all of us were laid off at the same time.

Hanscom

Right after that, though, is when I applied for the Cal State Long Beach job and--

Collings

Yes, the alumni relations.

Hanscom

--and became the alumni director there. Then after that I went to work for the Long Beach Chamber of Commerce, which might not seem like a traditional

ally of the work I do now, but that's partly why I have the views I do, I think, in the work I do, because I did work there for several years, and I understand, I think, how people who are in a chamber of commerce sort of effort, how they think and how we can sometimes find common ground with them.

Collings

Okay, yes. What about--did you meet--

Hanscom

Then I went to work [at the Chamber of Commerce] and [then] started my own business after that.

Hanscom

Yes. And did you meet people that you sort of were able to use those relationships later on?

Hanscom

Not so much, because I haven't really done a lot of work--

Collings

There, yes.

Hanscom

--in that same location. Interestingly, one of the people who had been on my marketing committee ended up working with Surfrider Foundation, and so we ended up working together. We both found our way to the environmental activist communities separately and have worked together since. That was kind of interesting.

Collings

Yes. So tell me about the business that you ran then.

Hanscom

Well, it was a sports marketing and special event public relations business. We did public relations for a number of different kinds of companies, but the real interest of our company was to work on events that had some kind of--almost always they were nonprofit or sports related efforts of some sort.

Collings

Were you interested in sports at that time?

Hanscom

Hadn't started that way, but the reason I got involved in that was I had volunteered for the 1984 Olympics and worked in the press area there--

Collings

Yes. That must have been fun.

Hanscom

--both two years before and during that 1984 competition. Worked with the sailing, yachting venue and the volleyball venue, so got very involved with them, and that sort of spurred on my interest.

Collings

Yes, and I suppose that by this time you were thinking that you might like to run your own business.

Hanscom

Yes. Yes. Well, a lot of things changed at the Chamber of Commerce, and it was just a good time to kind of be launched off there. One of the things I did there was help put on a Pacific Rim Expo, which brought in a lot of interests from Alaska that worked in tandem with Long Beach, and so I made some contacts there that sort of were interested in the kinds of services I could provide in a private company.

Collings

Yes. Well, that's great. But you no longer have this business.

Hanscom

No. No, about eight years into it, I, like I said, was--I think like most people have sort of times in their life when they reevaluate what they're doing and have all kinds of circumstances converge, which was what was happening with me. My father passed away. A very important relationship ended. I was just kind of in a place where I was looking deeper within myself as to what am I doing and why. But I wasn't at all thinking about closing my business. That was really like a part of me.

Hanscom

But it was during that time that I picked up Al Gore's book, *Earth in the Balance*, and started reading it, and halfway through it I was just very convinced I had to do something. I wasn't sure what, but I just knew I had to do something. His writing and what he said in that book was so compelling that there was such a huge problem that needed more than anybody was thinking or doing at that time. This was 1991.

Hanscom

So by the time I finished the book, I started actually looking for potential jobs in the environment, not realizing that, unlike the rest of the for-profit world, where your skills can transfer from one thing to another. Not so much in the nonprofit world. You really have to kind of come up through the ranks, and I didn't know that at the time. Although that may be a little different now, because some of the big nonprofits are hiring from outside more. But they didn't at the time. But nonetheless I started sending off resumes and thinking that was what I was going to do.

Hanscom

Then finally I started volunteering for the Sierra Club when I realized that the Bolsa Chica Wetlands near where I was living in Huntington Beach at that time, that they were at risk, and decided that I needed to at least volunteer. So that got me on my track toward wetlands.

Collings

Now, what made you pick up the Al Gore book in the first place?

Hanscom

That's a good question. I'm not really sure. I've always been an avid reader, so it could just be that I was in a bookstore one day and saw it. I can't tell you. That's a very good question. I did have, as one of our clients--interestingly, but I didn't put it together at that time--one of our clients was the Sierra Club who was working on something related to the Ballona Wetlands, and they had some kind of event they put on, Wetlands Preservation '90, and we were brought in to help bring in some of the sponsors for the event. So I learned a little bit about wetlands through that. We had had a number of clients who did environmental things, so I was kind of interested and obviously always had a love for the ocean and the coast, and so had a little inclination towards that.

Hanscom

But I'm not really sure why I picked up the book, so good question. I think he was running for vice president at that time, perhaps. Maybe that was why.

Collings

You might have, yes.

Hanscom

I was always interested somewhat in politics.

Collings

Yes. Well, yes, and he certainly went on to become vice president, as we know.

[Laughter]

Hanscom

Yes, he did, and people are now paying much more attention to him than they did back then on these issues.

Collings

Yes. Yes, that's right. Okay, so did you sell your business, or what did you do with it?

Hanscom

No, I just decided to close it finally.

Collings

Just disbanded it.

Hanscom

Yes.

Collings

You were sending off these resumes, and you became a volunteer with the Sierra Club. But did you need to support yourself at that time?

Hanscom

Yes, I finally--well, I worked part-time in a real estate office, of all things, to just pay the bills and keep things going. But then I got a part-time offer for a job at the Campaign to Save California Wetlands, and so I worked part-time for

them at a much lower price than anything I had ever thought I would work for. I mean, it wasn't like what I was sending out my resumes for.

Hanscom

But by then I had made a lot of other changes and realized I didn't need as much as I used to think I did when I had my business and all these trappings around me. It was not as important to have a really fancy car and all the things I thought I needed.

Collings

So prior to that you had had, as you say, a really fancy--

Hanscom

A nice car, yes, yes, I mean, and I traveled a lot. I just decided I didn't need all those things. So I worked part-time for the Campaign to Save California Wetlands, and then also had a friend who had founded Surfrider, and they said they needed someone part-time, so I worked part-time for both of those groups for a while before I had this opportunity to start the Wetlands Action Network.

Collings

So it sounds like you were willing to take this much lower salary in order to gain the experience.

Hanscom

And to do the work. It was important work that needed to be done whether it was being paid a lot or not.

Collings

So you started having strong feelings in that area.

Hanscom

Yes. I became the chair very quickly of the Sierra Club's Bolsa Chica Task Force and got to understand a lot more why--I mean, I rode my bicycle by the wetlands and always thought it was beautiful, but didn't really understand why they were important. The more I learned about them, the more committed I became to being a champion for these important ecosystems that seemed to be pretty much dismissed. You know, everybody was talking about the rain forests then, and that was like the big thing, but nobody was really paying much attention to wetlands. In fact, a lot of--

Collings

Right. That's right, and especially around here. You hear about it more in the southern parts of the country and Florida.

Hanscom

Yes, or even the East Coast. There's an international designation for wetlands called Ramsar wetlands of international importance, and it relates to an international treaty the United States is in. It's called a convention, but it's like a treaty that we're involved with, with a number of other countries around the world. The first few and only Ramsar designation of wetlands of international

importance for a number of years were in the eastern and southern part of the country. There was nothing on the West Coast at all. Now we finally have a few wetlands that are designated such here. But no one was really paying much attention to them.

Collings

So at what point did you decide that you would begin the Wetlands Action Network?

Hanscom

Well, in 1995, the end of '94, I had a discussion with Andrew Beath at the Earth Trust Foundation up in Malibu. I had told him that I was looking at starting a wetlands group that would be more focused on education and helping to outreach to help people understand how important these places were. He said, "Well, I like the idea." At that time I was thinking about doing it up in Northern California, because I just thought there was more interest and concern about the environment there. I didn't really think people in L.A. cared that much. He said, "Well, I'd like you to do it here, though, and we'll support you by giving you an office, and I can hire you part-time for the Earth Trust Foundation to do some work for us, and then you can get it started here."

Hanscom

So he kind of gave us a home and an incubation spot to be in, and I liked the area where they were up in Big Rock and Malibu. It was a little bit away from the city and the busyness here, and I thought, "Well, maybe." So that's what kept me here, and the efforts at the Ballona Wetlands have, which drew me in pretty quickly, about less than a year after that. That's really what's kept me here, because I was proven wrong. People in Los Angeles do care very much, and it's been surprising to me how much interest there has been in this place once people knew a little bit about it.

Collings

Did you have particular experiences which made you think that there wasn't much interest in Southern California for environmental issues?

Hanscom

Just what I'd read and seen; it seemed like people who were as committed and interested in the environment and environmental protection as I felt, all seemed to be based up in Northern California. A lot of the environmental groups were based up there. A lot of the environmental groups that were here, the few that were here, seemed to be focused on a few things and didn't seem to really want to get their hands into things in a deep way. I've actually seen the environmental community here in L.A. change significantly during the time that the Ballona movement happened, and some other things sort of converged at the same time.

Collings

So you started off the Wetlands Action Network with one office and yourself. How did you grow the organization?

Hanscom

Well, I was actually engaged in Ballona by a person named Bruce Robertson. He is a private detective who started a group called the Ballona Valley Preservation League. He was just starting to start that group. He came up to our office and had also talked to Earth Trust and to us about him starting this group. Then he said, "You know, Marcia, I want to show you some maps about what is really happening there and how important this place is."

Hanscom

So I went and looked at them and was astonished to see the plans for what might happen. He really pulled me into the movement here. I was going to focus much more on wetlands in general all up and down the coast, and he helped me see how--

Collings

Which is why the name is more general.

Hanscom

Right. Right. But Ballona became a big part of our focus. We still continued to work on other wetlands, but Ballona became probably 60 to 80 percent of our work for a good eight-year period, in part because I could see that the few groups that were doing anything on it really needed some professional help and needed some expertise in getting the word out. They were getting no articles in the newspaper, virtually; nothing that was really outreaching to the greater community, which was why these maps were such a surprise to me.

Hanscom

Then after Bruce asked me to get involved, we decided to start a coalition, and we started this coalition with six groups, the Sierra Club; his group, Wetlands Action Network; and three others. [Interruption and off-tape conversation.]

Collings

Why don't you go ahead and repeat the names of those groups. There was Sierra Club--

Hanscom

Okay, so we started the coalition with 6 groups, the Sierra Club; Ballona Valley Preservation League; Wetlands Action Network; Ballona Wetlands Land Trust, which was a very small fledgling community group. There were two others-- oh, Earth Trust Foundation; and there was one other [Save Ballona Wetlands], and it's escaping me at the moment. But these 6 groups ended up [being part of a coalition with] 126 groups by the time we were finished, and that was never our intention. We were really only going to be just this coalition of 6 groups who were going to fight for this place.

Hanscom

But then when we decided to start trying to bring more people in, that became a big part of our outreach. Then a few months into this coalition effort, DreamWorks decided to get involved, and Steven Spielberg was going to build a movie studio at Ballona. And I thought, you know, we are going to focus more effort here than we were because I saw it as an opportunity that unbeknownst to Spielberg and his colleagues, this could be a really good opportunity to help educate the public about the importance of wetlands. I know that wasn't his intention in coming in here, but I could see, from my own professional experience, that that was going to be something--you know, his involvement would help us to really get the word out, and it did. It did.

Collings

Just by fighting against him and using his name, that would get press.

Hanscom

Yes. I mean, there are a lot of people who think that once you're up against a powerful influence, you can't get media exposure, but that's not my experience, especially when you have someone that high of a profile. If it had just been David Geffen and Jeffrey Katzenberg, maybe not so much, but Spielberg is known everywhere. I can tell you, there were hundreds of journalists that we had that we have toured the wetlands with from all over the world, not just here; in fact, more from away from here to begin with, and then finally, you know, some of the L.A. journalists started getting involved.

Hanscom

But the television cameras were just everywhere. We did get very creative and colorful in some of the things we did to help create images for them, but I've got tapes and tapes and tapes of television news clips that helped us to get the word out about how important this place was, and I think that, in large part, did help influence them to finally leave four years later, which was a good decision for them. I'm told that DreamWorks did much better with their films after they left.

Collings

Oh, really. Why would that be?

Hanscom

I don't know.

Collings

Oh, well, okay. Just luck, huh?

Hanscom

Some of their people told us that, so I said, "Good." I mean, we did protest at their premieres and had children writing letters to Spielberg and did a lot of things that I'm sure did not cut into their profits greatly, but did not help their public image, either.

Collings

Right. Right. So it was actually quite fortuitous that they tried to build a facility here.

Hanscom

In a way. You know, some of our detractors would say, "Oh, they're just using that to get their names in the paper." Well, no, we had a motive in mind. It wasn't to get our names in the paper. It was really to--

Collings

To publicize.

Hanscom

--educate people and publicize to people, and did we use that fact? Yes, we did, because it was--my good friend Paul Watson with Sea Shepherd Society always says, "It has to sizzle," in order to get the media attention, and he's right about that.

Collings

So you were saying that when you first came into the environmental area, you were sort of surprised at how unsavvy people were about using the media.

Hanscom

About using the media and also in terms of marketing and professional communications, whether it was brochures or newsletters. Of course, part of that has gotten better because of computers getting better and easier to access, but I was rather astonished at the materials that you just had to deal with. There wasn't much there that you could communicate with people. So that was something that I think has gotten better.

Collings

Yes. So what are some of the ways that you contributed to the Sierra Club's efforts in that?

Hanscom

Well, that was one of my first efforts was to put together a professional newsletter for our Bolsa Chica Task Force that looked like we knew what we were doing and could be believed. That's a lot of it, is how image and how someone sees you is a lot of whether they will listen to you.

Collings

Yes. Did you find much resistance to this idea that you need to package the message effectively?

Hanscom

No. I just think that there was a culture of not ever having thought of that, or, "Oh, wow, you can do that? Great." But, you know, I mean, it was welcomed; it just wasn't part of the culture or part of what was even considered.

Collings

Yes. Okay, so you went sort of loggerheads against the Playa Vista development, you know, pretty soon into the Wetlands Action Network

organization as well. Of course, we'll talk about that in more detail, but just, you know, sort of working backward, how do you feel about the building that has taken place up to this point?

Hanscom

Well, I wish none of it had. We fought very hard to protect the entire 1,087 acres out there. We ended up with 620 acres in public ownership at this point, which is almost two-thirds more than what the developers had promised to the Friends of the Ballona Wetlands. So we did make some major progress. We also got the land put into public ownership, whereas the land Playa Vista was promising to the Friends, it was always a question whether it would be still owned by them or sort of an easement. There were a lot of little things that we undid in the deal by getting the state to acquire this land, and it includes a large chunk of the Ballona Creek channel out here, including 83 acres of the creek itself that was owned by Playa Vista, which means the State of California now has a stake in our creek here, which is really good.

Hanscom

So I'm not happy that we didn't get it all, but if we hadn't gone for it all, we never would have gotten what we did. There still are several hundred acres at play in the Phase 2 area. Unfortunately, Playa Vista started building right at Jefferson and Lincoln, so it looks like a big wall right there, and a lot of people don't know that there's still some land back behind that toward the freeway that is still in question. The Ballona Wetlands Land Trust and Surfrider Foundation are still fighting for that and have won a big court decision recently, and so it's possible, at least, the public might get another hundred acres, two hundred acres, somewhere in there.

Hanscom

But Playa Vista itself is not at all what it was promoted to be.

Collings

Which was very environmentally friendly.

Hanscom

Oh yes. When I got involved in this, a lot of the environmental groups thought it was a great deal, because they were convinced by the people who were the developers at the time that this would be the most environmentally conscious development ever, that everyone would work and live there and never leave and have to use a car, and all of these things that we knew weren't probably likely, and in fact, not only shown to be not true, but even the things they did promise, like having all native plants, there's not one native plant on the site, not even a native sycamore tree anywhere, willows, nothing like that. All of the recycling, very, very advanced recycling facilities they said they would have there, they don't have. So a lot of it was sort of a bait and switch.

Collings

Right. I mean, one of the main things that they were promoting was that it would be a mixed-use facility, and as you said, that people would not have to commute long distances to their job.

Hanscom

Right, and they started blaming the people fighting Phase 2 on the fact that, "Well, if you fight us on that, we won't have our commercial space for the people who live here." That was not even true; most of what they said the entire time I've been involved with them has been not true. But in Phase 1 they had four million feet of commercial space approved. They could have already had plenty of commercial, shopping center or whatever, for the residents that live there now, and they haven't been able to attract that.

Hanscom

Some of it is the market. Some of it is the dangers on the site itself. There are some very serious problems with that location. It's in a high-risk liquefaction zone. It's got methane in very large amounts underneath the surface. The people who live there and work there have to pay double the taxes. They have to pay a Mello-Roos [Act] assessment in order to pay for all of the things the developer normally would pay for but they got this special financing mechanism in so that they wouldn't have to. So there are a lot of problems with anyone being there, and many who have invested there have actually resold the places and left.

Collings

Interesting.

Hanscom

It's a good question how many people actually live there right now. It's not filled up; that's for sure.

Collings

Yes, I know it's not filled up, but I was going to ask you if you were aware of the actual occupancy rate.

Hanscom

No. At night, you know, we'd look at the lights to see if we could figure it out, how many people are really there. But there's a lot of empty units, definitely.

Collings

Yes. Has the organization had any contact with the people who live there, in terms of letting people know about the wetlands?

Hanscom

The Wetlands Action Network still does monthly nature walks, and then when my partner [Roy van de Hoek] and I moved down here to Playa del Rey, he and I started a new organization called the Ballona Institute, which specifically does restoration here at the wetlands and also in the lagoon areas that the city owns, and we do educational tours. Ballona Institute did some van tours last year for seniors, because it's sort of a hard place to really get around to all of the area

and see, and they were very successful. We had a number of people come who lived in Playa Vista, so we've gotten to know some of the folks over there. We also do some bicycle nature rides up and down the creek, and we've had a couple of people from Playa Vista come on those. The people we've met who live there are really nice people, and some of them have some very serious concerns about what's going on there as well, so it's kind of interesting.

Collings

Okay, because I was just wondering whether the supposed environmentally friendly situation of Playa Vista had attracted a certain type of person.

Hanscom

Well, it's hard to say, because we don't know--

Collings

Whether it's true or not.

Hanscom

We don't know everybody that's there. But the people that we know who are there came for very different reasons. Some of them got good deals because they knew someone who knew the developer. I wouldn't say that environmentalists were attracted to live there at all. [Laughter] I would say that it's really pretty clear to most people that it's not the environmental--

Collings

Whatever it's advertised to be, yes.

Hanscom

--whatever they thought it was. Yes. But I do think they're luring people in with lots of different things. The developer has actually subcontracted out to separate builders now, and so one of the builders was offering like all these free furniture things. They're offering different things than you would normally get to move into a condo, so lots of incentives happening.

Collings

Okay. Let's see. Okay, so we were just talking about how, in this very media-rich environment, it becomes evident that it's so important to be able to use those tools to promote any kind of message, whether it's an advertising or an environmental message, and you had a comment.

Hanscom

Well, yes. That's part of what's kept me here in Los Angeles, as much as I haven't always--I have sort of a love-hate relationship with L.A. As I've gotten to know it better from a geographic standpoint and a biological standpoint, living with a biologist-- [Interruption]

Hanscom

Living with a biologist-geographer, I've gotten to understand really what Los Angeles is better, so that part I've started to really love and learn more about. But I also really just hate the congestion and the number of people and the

buildings. I'd like to be in a place like I was when I lived in the Santa Monica Mountains, a little closer to nature. This isn't too bad right here by the wetlands.

Collings

No, it's very nice. It's lovely.

Hanscom

That allows me to stay, too. But part of my motivation in staying here has been that there is such a large media presence here, and so therefore if you know how to use that and communicate through that to the public, you can reach a lot more people, and we certainly need to reach a lot more people.

Collings

Yes. So it sounds like sort of one of the main purposes of your organization at this point is precisely to utilize your communication skills and to get the message about the wetlands out to the public.

Hanscom

Right. Right, and in fact, that's part of what our purpose was in starting this Ballona Institute, and we just now have gotten some space for a library archive, and we also have a small nature store we're going to be opening, where the public can actually come and find out more, just like we have, of the treasures that we really have right here in L.A., even amongst this big urban environment.

Collings

How are you going to publicize the Ballona Institute?

Hanscom

Well, we've been doing it so far through our tours, through our bicycle tours and our van tours, but we'll also be putting out announcements. We're probably going to be having monthly programs where we'll have someone talk about different bird species or plants of interest. We have a number of endangered species right here in Los Angeles. A lot of people wouldn't even--you know, they've written off L.A. I find even when I go to the Coastal Commission or the Fish and Game Commission, "Oh, Los Angeles." That's not as big a deal as the Monterey coast or somewhere else--

Collings

Oh yes, it's so beautiful up there.

Hanscom

--where we have all these things, yet we have an endangered bird that nests right out here on our beach that comes all the way from Guatemala every year; the California Least Tern comes here, and it's one of the largest Least Tern preserves anywhere on the coast, right here in Los Angeles. We have a couple of other rare and endangered birds and rare plants that survive out here, some rare lizard species, and those are important. They're not just important because they were here lots longer than we've been here, but they're important for the

many, many people who do live here to have access to. Some of the people in Los Angeles, especially in the inner city areas, will never even get to the Monterey coast or maybe not even the Los Angeles coast. But to have a place where they can kind of find out a little bit more about nature and about the importance of nature and our connection to it, how vital it is, really, for the continuance of our earth as we know it, then that's what we hope to do here.

Collings

Now, do you look for opportunities to get these issues into the paper, you know, such as the Spielberg thing?

Hanscom

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

Collings

What are some other--

Hanscom

Well, like one of the things we're going to be doing this year is, because the purchase of the wetlands was done during a very--what's the word?--a very harrowing time of a recall of our governor [Gray Davis], we never had any public event at all to celebrate the fact that we've acquired the wetlands. A lot of people don't even know that they've been acquired. The Fish and Game Department, who owns a lot of it, hasn't been very good at putting signage up. So we've talked with the [California] Resources Agency at the state, and they said, "Well, you know, our budget is tight, but if you guys can figure out how to pay for it, we'll come down and help make such an announcement."

Hanscom

So this next year we decided to take them up on it. We've been working for the last couple of years on a book called "Celebrate Ballona!" that will have photographs and poetry and other images of the wetlands that we will be giving out at three different events. We're going to have a big family picnic. We're going to have an artistic event with readings and music in the evening. And then we're going to have a big dinner honoring some of the journalists who stuck their necks out to help get the word out. At each of those events that book will be given out to people so that they can see what you kind of have to get close to, to really know is out there. I mean, we've got some beautiful photographs of wildflowers and butterflies and some of the species that are out there that no one knows, whishing by on Lincoln Boulevard, even exist.

Hanscom

So this year we're going to be doing a lot of our outreach focus, focused on those events.

Collings

So I guess that begs the question of funding and fundraising, because all of this costs money.

Hanscom

Right. Well, the book is actually a fundraiser in disguise, and we are working with a very good design firm, who has donated their services to us. They actually did guerilla posters during our campaign that would pop up once in a while and be sent out to various people. They're a very, very, very fine design firm, and they've helped us design this book so that it will be beautiful and no one will ever know that it's a fundraiser book. But at the bottom of each photograph there will be a place where someone can have their name if they pay for that page. So that's how we're raising the money to make the events happen and--

Collings

Yes. Oh, that's great.

Hanscom

--get the book published.

Collings

Yes. And do you consult for other environmental groups at all in this area?

Hanscom

I've got enough work just with my own efforts to keep this going. But I have a number of advisors and supporters who are helping with this. I'm not doing this all on my own; I'm just kind of a spearhead.

Collings

Right, the tip of the spear, as they say.

Hanscom

Yes.

Collings

Okay. Okay. Well, we'll talk more about this then.

Hanscom

Yes. Okay, great.

Collings

Great. [End of interview]

1.2. Session 2 (May 23, 2008)

Collings

This is Jane Collings interviewing Marcia Hanscom at the Shallow Water Nature Store of the Ballona Institute, May 23rd, 2008.

Collings

Good morning, Marcia.

Hanscom

Good morning.

Collings

So we were just talking about how we were going to get into sketching out the history of the Wetlands Action Network, and you said that you were going to describe how the Wetlands Action Network was one of several groups that were in a consortium.

Hanscom

Well, Wetlands Action Network was formed in 1995, the summer of 1995, and we were founded first as a project of the Earth Trust Foundation in Malibu. Andrew Beath, the founder of that group, liked the work that I was proposing we would do with Wetlands Action Network, which originally was going to be primarily more education oriented, public education oriented, about the importance of wetlands, because it just seemed that people didn't understand how important they were or why. So we formed Wetlands Action Network up in Malibu, and about a year and a half to two years after that we sort of fledged from the nest and became our own 501(c)(3), nonprofit organization.

Hanscom

But in the midst of that, about six months after we started Wetlands Action Network, a man named Bruce Robertson came to us. He had just started the Ballona Valley Preservation League, and he showed me the maps of what was going to happen at the Ballona Wetlands here on the Los Angeles coast.

Collings

The Playa Vista project.

Hanscom

Right. The maps of the proposed Playa Vista project and how much of the Ballona Wetlands would be destroyed if Playa Vista were built as proposed. It was so dramatic and shocking to me that I said, "Well, I think I need to get involved in some way." So we talked further and talked with a couple of other groups that we knew were concerned. There were six organizations that started a new coalition in the fall of 1995, and that coalition we decided to call citizens to Save All of Ballona.

Collings

Now, these groups existed before anybody had even heard of the Playa Vista project.

Hanscom

Some did; some didn't. The Playa Vista project was actually first proposed in the 1970s, the mid-seventies, by the Summa Corporation. So the Sierra Club was around, and they were one of the first of the six groups in our coalition, but most of the other groups I don't think were around at that time. Certainly the Ballona Valley Preservation League that had just started, and the Wetlands Action Network that had just started, were not around when the first proposal came out.

Hanscom

A lot of people actually thought that things had been settled after that first proposal, and they had been settled by one group, Friends of Ballona Wetlands. In 1990 they finally, after ten years of negotiations with the developers, they settled a Coastal Commission lawsuit they had brought against the project, and they agreed to something that many people thought was going to be better, but when we looked at the maps and the density that actually had been added to the project, while some more land was going to be saved, it was going to be double the size of the project. We just didn't feel that the area could handle that. We also felt that it wasn't a good trade-off to really allow that much building on any of this coastal marshland.

Collings

So when you say to save all of Ballona, that means that you, whereas Friends of the Ballona Wetlands was allowing work east of Lincoln [Boulevard]--

Hanscom

Not just east of Lincoln. They actually had a proposal that allowed building west of Lincoln Boulevard as well.

Collings

Or, excuse me, east of Lincoln.

Hanscom

Yes. Now there is only building east of Lincoln, but their settlement allowed quite a bit of development west of Lincoln Boulevard, and some in Area C, which is the area north of Ballona Creek but east of Lincoln, which we've now preserved. So the Friends' deal was better than Audubon's [Audubon Society's] deal, which started in the seventies. They were going to be allowed to save about 70 acres. Then the developers came in with the Friends and made a deal that would save about 240. We saved over 600 acres as a result of the work that we built upon the Friends' history.

Hanscom

It was a challenge, because the Friends' deal was painted as this environmentally sound development when it really wasn't. They actually were forced into being at opposition to other environmental groups because the terms of their settlement required them to write letters to the editor against us, to stand up at hearings against us, to show up at television interviews against us. They were actually required to do that as part of their settlement, which was very unfortunate, because it caused a split that, to this day, we're attempting to heal.

Collings

So you were painting it before I sort of got you off track, you were painting the groups that were involved.

Hanscom

Yes. So there were six groups that started this coalition. Wetlands Action Network and Ballona Valley Preservation League and Sierra Club were like the three that really were pushing and sort of the leaders of that coalition, which by the end of our work when the 600 acres were acquired by the State of California--which, by the way, the 240 acres that the Friends had been originally promised had never been actually set aside; it was all "if the entire development got built," then they might get this saved, and it wasn't even going to be public land. It was going to be a private conservancy. We really felt strongly that the land needed to be in state or federal ownership for the highest and best protection. So we now have 600 acres in public ownership.

Hanscom

But at the time it was very challenging, because most people thought this was going to be a great development, and we had a lot of work to do. A few months after we started our coalition, DreamWorks came into the picture, which we did not anticipate, and all of a sudden they were going to be a one-third development partner on this project. They were a very popular company that everybody loved, that contributed a lot of money to the Democratic Party and, of course, most of the politicians in this area were Democrats, and so it was a big challenge.

Hanscom

But I felt that it was actually an opportunity, and it sort of moved Wetlands Action Network away from the primary mission of education into more litigation and advocacy and activism support, which was partly because I sort of like looked at the whole picture, and having a public relations background, I realized that it was something--that Steven Spielberg, while not his intention, he could be to wetlands as Sting was to the rain forests. You know, he could help us, not knowingly or perhaps desiring to, he could help us catapult the issue into something that could really be understood, especially here in Los Angeles, the media capital of the world.

Hanscom

So we decided to make the Ballona Wetlands a major part of our focus. Even though Wetlands Action Network did work on some other wetlands issues on the coast, the Ballona Wetlands became probably 60 to 70 percent of our work for a number of years. It was because we saw this opportunity to educate the public, and indeed, we did. It was interesting. While the Los Angeles environmental community and political community was sold on Playa Vista at the time, it took about [eight to] ten years to really turn that political wheel around to where it is today, where it's not seen as this environmental project, even with it being smaller.

Hanscom

What was interesting was that because of Steven Spielberg's involvement--and to some degree, David Geffen and Jeffrey Katzenberg, but more Spielberg being the main one that's so well known worldwide--we had the opportunity to take journalists from all over the world through these wetlands and to help them see why even in such a very urban, dense area like Los Angeles, why a small coastal wetland here is still functioning and so important for not just the ecology, the Pacific flyway, the fishing off of--the whole fisheries in Santa Monica Bay, but also for the public that desperately needs some open space and wild area nearby.

Collings

Yes. Well, just in doing some research for this interview, it was certainly heavily covered in Variety.

Hanscom

It was. It was.

Collings

And I don't think you'd find many wetlands issues covered in Variety.

Hanscom

That's right. That's right. Daily Variety and Hollywood Reporter were pretty much following this. For the four years that DreamWorks was involved, they covered it better than the Los Angeles Times, which was interesting, I thought.

Collings

Yes. So do you think that Spielberg and Geffen and Katzenberg ever had a sense of what your position was? I mean, finally they withdrew the deal, and it was said at the time that it was because they were having some funding issues. Did you ever get any sense that there was another matter?

Hanscom

Well, it's hard for me to believe that some of the wealthiest men in Hollywood had funding issues. However, that said, you know, maybe every project pencils out or doesn't, and maybe it didn't for them eventually. They were planning on being developers here, not just building their movie studio, and part of it was the development would help fund the studio. A lot of people didn't know that, and that was part of our big objection. They weren't just going to be tenants, but they were actually driving the development, and especially with their incredible clout. You know, it's hard to know. I would like to think that maybe they came to their senses a bit, but there were clues early on that they really didn't have, initially, at least, the consciousness to understand what was going on.

Hanscom

One of our early protests, when DreamWorks was having a big opening at the wetlands, a big announcement that they were going to be part of this team, and they had these huge tents out there near the Spruce Goose hangar beneath Loyola [Marymount University]. It was raining, and just everybody in

Hollywood was going to be there, and political people and journalists from all over. We had a group of maybe thirty or forty activists out in the rain with our protest signs covered in plastic so you could still see them, and we had several people dressed as frogs, because one of the things we knew about the area where they were going to put their studio was it was this incredible frog chorus area that you could go up on the bluffs at Loyola and hear every night.

Hanscom

We just didn't want to see that go away, and so shouted that there were wetlands there, even though Playa Vista pretended there were not. "Oh, it's just an old Howard Hughes airfield," they would say, but we knew there were wetlands, delineated wetlands by the Army Corps of Engineers, even. That's why they had to have a permit to destroy them. So we were there, and all the limos had to go past our protest site, because it was right at the street where they had to go in. Steven Spielberg said something to the crowd that was caught on all the television stations. He said, "I want to welcome every frog in Los Angeles to please come to Playa Vista. When the wetlands are complete, you'll have a home here, too."

Hanscom

So he knew early on we had a concern, but that statement was so uninformed about what the whole situation, is that they were going to make a home for the frogs; that the frogs were already there; you know, it was very odd. The frogs obviously got to them, though, and it was a theme throughout our campaign, because there was subsequently a year or two later there was a [President] Bill [William J.] Clinton fundraiser at Ron [Ronald Burkle]--can't think of his name; Green Acres is his estate. He's the owner of Yucaipa, Ralph's Markets. Ron somebody; I'll think of it. Anyway, at his home--he's a big Democratic Party fundraiser--there were some protesters there.

Hanscom

Someone yelled out to him, "David Geffen, save the Ballona Wetlands," as he got out of his car.

Hanscom

And he yelled back very angrily, "If you want to save the frogs, go protest at the French restaurants."

Hanscom

So again, it just didn't seem like they understood completely. At one point we met with Jeffrey Katzenberg as a result of Jerry Rubin having done a hunger strike, and we were actually told that it wasn't allowed to be thought of that it was because of the hunger strike, but it was. We actually offered him a proposal. We said, "You know, you could build on the part that was already paved by Howard Hughes, and we would be okay with that, if you would just then help us with your political clout to get the funding to acquire the rest of the

land. Wouldn't you rather have a wildlife preserve around you than this massive city?"

Hanscom

Because it seemed to us, from stories we'd heard, that that was one of the things, the charming things, that Spielberg felt about this area was how open and beautiful it was. They put him up on a scissor lift and he looked out. That was all going to be gone with Playa Vista built around him. But he would have none of it, and he continued to say, Mr. Katzenberg on camera, that there were no wetlands anywhere near where they were. First he would say the wetlands are blocks away from us. Then he would say they were miles away from us.

Hanscom

We kept saying, "Well, good. Just keep getting further from them, and maybe that will do it." So there were stories. When we had a documentary filmmaker--

Collings

Sheila Laffey?

Hanscom

Sheila Laffey was one of the documentary makers, and when she did her screening, her first screening, the premiere was held at the Museum of Tolerance. They had a really nice auditorium there. There were several people who thought they saw Spielberg slip in and out of that screening, which he's known to do for film screenings, interestingly. And he has a good personal connection with that museum, so it's possible. Sheila also actually ran into him a month or two before they pulled out at a restaurant and talked to him and urged him to look at her film. So there are people who think that maybe.

Hanscom

We had thousands, literally thousands, of schoolchildren writing letters to him. We were at all of their film premieres, both Spielberg's himself as well as other DreamWorks films. We had a lot of presence that they knew we were out there. They certainly had the opportunity to hear the message. I actually think that one of the--it was probably a number of things that helped him decide.

Hanscom

About two months before they pulled out, there was a hearing at the Regional Water Board about the contamination on the site. There's a huge plume of water on top of the groundwater--a plume of toxic contaminants on top of the groundwater that had been formed because of all the pollutants that had been dumped, solvents and things, over the years at the Hughes Aircraft site before there were environmental laws. Those had to all be cleaned up, and they weren't cleaned up yet.

Hanscom

When DreamWorks actually had--just the spring before the summer they pulled out, they had actually finally purchased the parcels of property they were going

to do their studio on, but they had an out that they could get out within six months if they found anything. Well, they did their own due diligence during that time, and it seemed from the Water Board hearing that they realized how contaminated things were; that it was much worse than Playa Vista had told them, perhaps. Their lawyers were arguing with the state lawyers that they were indemnified; they weren't really responsible. The state lawyers were saying, "No, you are if you're a landowner now. That's the law in California."

Hanscom

It was only a couple of months after that that they pulled out. You know, my guess is that they knew they were going to be living there. They were going to have the daycare center for their employees. It wasn't going to be just like a developer who comes in and leaves. So they probably had a higher standard of what they were willing to live with, influencing their decision.

Hanscom

It wasn't talked about much, but I'm sure that the public relations of the entire thing couldn't have been something they liked, either. I mean, their reputation when we started was sterling. It was very difficult to convince people that Steven Spielberg or any of these guys would be doing anything bad environmentally. By the time they left, they had more of a tarnished reputation than they would have liked, I'm sure.

Collings

Now, you said, "We were there at their premieres and openings." You were there with some kind of protest.

Hanscom

Protesting, yes, outside with signs. We kind of brought the art of protest back to Los Angeles, I think. There were not a lot of environmental groups doing protest with signs. It was more, you know, in the courts or in the hearing rooms where environmental groups did things in L.A. at that time. But we brought sort of performance art into the protest arena for environmental issues, and it's still there today. I mean, there are a lot of people who call us up and ask if they can borrow our frog or our turtle costumes that were made with some of the artists that were involved with our movement.

Collings

Who were the artists that were involved?

Hanscom

Well, the 18th Street Arts Complex [18th Street Arts Center] in Santa Monica got involved. Jan Williamson, who's the executive director there, who's an artist herself, was very involved with helping make all the giant puppets that were part of our movement. We did these Earth Water Air Los Angeles, EWALA, walks where we every Earth Day had a walk going from Ahmanson Ranch, which was one of the headwaters of the Los Angeles River, following the river

route to Ballona, where it used to historically come out. So there were a number of people involved with that.

Hanscom

Susan Suntree, who is a performance artist, she helped put together EWALA, and she also put together a group of actors who started a troupe that Wetlands Action Network supported, called FrogWorks. That was sort of a foil to DreamWorks. FrogWorks did political street theater that was performed at Third Street Promenade on the Venice boardwalk.

Collings

Was Cheri Gaulke part of that? Because I know that she has a piece called FrogWorks.

Hanscom

I don't know Cheri Gaulke. No, and I'm interested in hearing about that, and I know Susan would be, too. But there were a number of other really courageous actors that got involved with that, because they knew it was like sort of a big thing to go up against DreamWorks. But to the very end, they were doing their performance art in schools and all over the place.

Collings

So do you think that--can I pause for a second?

Hanscom

Sure. [Tape recorder turned off.]

Collings

Okay. So we're back on now. I wanted to ask you, do you think that the artist groups that you were working with would have gotten involved if there hadn't been that target of DreamWorks?

Hanscom

Hmm. That's interesting. Possibly not. At the same time, it wasn't easy for anyone to get involved because of DreamWorks. DreamWorks was sort of a double-edged sword. People were terrified to get involved with our movement because of them. We had actors who would come to us who were involved who pulled out, who were counseled by other actors, "You've got to get out." You know, the whole "You will never work in this town again" was really going around. Tom Hayden, who was our only political ally originally, was threatened by Jeffrey Katzenberg with he would never have Hollywood support again.

Hanscom

So it was very challenging for people to get involved. At the same time, for people of courage who also felt strongly about the principle and understood the creative opportunity, that was there. So there were a lot of people, detractors, who would say, "Oh, she just wants her name in the paper, and she's getting her name in the paper because of Steven Spielberg." Well, that wasn't why I was

doing it, nor most of the people working with us. It was an opportunity to get the issue heard, and we did take advantage of that, and I would not apologize for it.

Hanscom

I think that it was a great education, and there are journalists today on television news who talk about the Ballona Wetlands or Ballona Creek in a way that they didn't understand it before. The very first television journalist who heard about our protest said, "We want to come down there. We understand you're against this DreamWorks thing."

Hanscom

"Okay."

Hanscom

"So what do we have to do? Do we need to get a boat? Where do we go?"

Hanscom

You know, no one really understood Ballona Creek or the Ballona Wetlands. The natural areas in Los Angeles, many of them are hidden beneath all the concrete and freeways. Now things are not as much of a mystery because of that, and so I think it was a good thing, both in Los Angeles and in a far broader reason. There was one television news story by Tom Brokaw that was on the national nightly news, and it ran during the presidential primary that year. It was done so well that United Airlines used it on all their cross-country flights during that entire next summer, and we would hear about people hearing about it from way far away. We would occasionally get a check from someone in New York or--it was interesting how the story was able to be told on a broader basis, sometimes more outside of L.A. than here in L.A.

Collings

And that was because of the DreamWorks connection.

Hanscom

Yes, absolutely. So I think they did something for wetlands as a whole, on a larger basis for the planet.

Collings

As far as the entertainment people who got involved but felt that it was risky, would there have been opportunities for them to have like protested Playa Vista as distinct from DreamWorks?

Hanscom

It was all wrapped up together by then, so, I mean, one of the actors was involved with our coalition before DreamWorks got involved, and the day we were out there protesting in the rain, I got a call from him, and he said, "David Geffen just called me and said my name's on the list of the coalition. Tell me again what I signed on to." So I read him the sentence of what we all agreed to, our mission was. He said, "Well, that doesn't sound so bad." [Laughter]

Hanscom

I said, "I agree."

Hanscom

He said, "Well, let me talk to him again," and he did, and he called back, and he said, "I just can't do it." His career was not--

Collings

Do you know who? Do you mind--

Hanscom

Yes. It was Ed Begley [Jr.]. At that time, his career wasn't doing as much as it ended up doing later, so he really felt like he needed to, and I understood that. It was his livelihood. This thing that Hollywood went through once before when people were blacklisted continued to be brought up. We had another actor who got involved who, you know, was told he couldn't. Now, since then, interestingly--

Collings

Who was that?

Hanscom

That was Jamie Cromwell, who later got an Academy Award. But then there was like Martin Sheen, who didn't care. This was before he was on West Wing, and he said, "Well, I may have a problem in this town now after this," and he did a protest where he came and locked down the doors of Playa Vista with a number of grandmothers and a priest. The police came, and he didn't get arrested, because they didn't want to arrest him and make a bigger deal, but, you know, he ended up going on to having a great career even after that.

Hanscom

So I think there was this fear that DreamWorks controlled everything in Hollywood, which wasn't true, but they were pretty influential and still are. But their studio lost a lot of cachet through this whole thing, I think. But it was an interesting thing, where people were--Hollywood was more willing to give money to rain forest projects elsewhere than to do something here in L.A. It was riskier.

Collings

Now, did you have a sense that there was any pressure on DreamWorks itself from other quarters to quash these protests, or was this--

Hanscom

I think it was their own self-interest. I don't think there was any--I mean, they were the ones controlling the--although, you know, I mean, Playa Vista itself, the company--which has sort of changed hands; it was Maguire Thomas [Partners] at the time, and then during this whole DreamWorks thing, [Robert] Maguire lost his whole financial backing and had a lot of problems. Jeffrey Katzenberg actually helped bring in new owners, essentially Morgan Stanley

and Goldman Sachs, who were even more daunting at times. But they were part of the DreamWorks team, and that's who runs this now.

Hanscom

So Playa Vista all along has said, "Oh, those wacky environmentalists, they don't know what they're talking about." And there's still that talk over at Playa Vista, even though much of what we have said proved to be true, and even though we ended up coming together on acquiring a big chunk of land out there, they're still bad-mouthing us. That's part of their thing, and maybe because it was in DreamWorks' best interests, they believed it.

Collings

But Playa Vista itself was supposed to be environmentally friendly, so are they able to bad-mouth environmentalists?

Hanscom

Well, that's just been a "greenwashing," in my view.

Collings

Greenwashing. [Laughs]

Hanscom

Yes. It really was. I mean, you can have low-flow toilets, but if you're putting those in the wrong place, in a high-risk liquefaction zone, in a flood plain of a historical river, in a place where there's higher methane deposits than anywhere else in the country--I mean, there are serious contamination problems. It was the wrong place to put this. It doesn't matter, you know, how much recycled paper you use at a project like that. And yes, they have some environmental bells and whistles, but it's a really environmentally damaging project.

Hanscom

It's right in the worst possible location on the west side for traffic. There are very few north-south connector streets there because of the geography of the bluffs, and so it's already a jammed area on the 405 Freeway and Lincoln Boulevard, and here they were going to add 28 percent more traffic to the 405 Freeway, and 86 percent traffic more on Lincoln Boulevard. It was just absurd to put a project like that here.

Hanscom

Many people would say we're a bit overbuilt already, and maybe we don't need more development in Los Angeles. That's the question I'd like to hear more people asking, is how can we grow, having more and more and more people, more and more and more development, more and more and more traffic? It just doesn't seem sustainable.

Collings

Well, one of the things that we hear as sort of the watchword is mixed use to keep people working and living in the same place, and Playa Vista advertises--

Hanscom

Allegedly.

Collings

--itself as a mixed-use development. But you don't see that as being--

Hanscom

Well, there are so many flaws with that proposition, to begin with. First of all, you can't force people to live and work in the same area. If you have a great job in Tarzana and you live in Santa Monica, do you give up your house or your job? You know, it's just not likely, and even with DreamWorks having the proposal to move in, there were a lot of people who said, "Well, that doesn't mean our graphic artists are going to move from Burbank." And, in fact, they ended up staying there with their animation area and probably would have stayed there even if DreamWorks ended up finally with their studio here, because their people wanted to live close to where they were working. But did they want to move and lose their entire investment by coming over here? That's one problem with that.

Hanscom

There's also a problem with the fact that Playa Vista itself has not come through with that promise. In their first phase alone, they were given entitlements to between three and four million square feet of commercial space, and they can't get much commercial interest in even being there. Maybe the office community is saturated. Maybe--I don't know what it is. But it's taken them seven or eight years to get a couple of little teeny retail outlets in the development. It's mostly residential. And now that the housing market is going down, who knows what that means? But it's not been the promise that they said.

Collings

Which was to bring a lot of--living and working--

Hanscom

Have everybody live and work in the same place and never leave. Well, that's the other fallacy. Even if you live and work in the same area, you know, I live down the street from this little store, and this is mixed use to me. But that doesn't mean I don't ever get in my car and go somewhere else.

Collings

Yes, of course.

Hanscom

So, I mean, that was the promise that that would happen.

Collings

Now, the Playa Vista development was important for the city as a way of bringing more businesses into the area and boosting city revenues in that way. Of course, it was being built in this sensitive spot. Have you been in touch with any other groups around the country that have been facing a similar situation,

where it's so important from a financial, city-planning point of view to do a development?

Hanscom

I think it always is. Unfortunately, because it's a big problem, our cities and counties in this country are dependent on revenues from the tax base, the development base. Often they want retail now, big retail, like big box stores or car dealerships, because they get even more than they get from--well, it depends, really.

Hanscom

I have a good friend who's the mayor of Huntington Beach, and she's always saying to me, "We've got to find a new way for cities to thrive than to be dependent on new development," because it's like an addiction cycle. Once this development is built, then the roads and the lights and all the things that this other developer built over here are falling apart, and we need to fix those, so we need more money to do that, so we've got to approve another development over here. You know, it's just a cycle that never ends, and the city services are not catching up, which is why we have a city budget problem right now, and why we have sidewalks and street problems that are--you know, so there's a bigger problem that needs to be fixed.

Hanscom

Sacramento or Washington [D.C.], I'm not sure who's getting their hands around it, but I have heard our new assembly speaker, Karen Bass, talk a little about that, so--promising, maybe. But we have to do something to have revenues not dependent on new development.

Collings

Right. Yes. So let's talk a little bit about some of the protest activities, because so many of them sound very creative and interesting. I mean, on the one hand, you have Jerry Rubin and the hunger strike, and on the other hand, you have some of the performances at Third Street. Were these protests something that was sort of coordinated through the Wetlands Action Network, or was it more ad hoc than that?

Hanscom

Well, a little of both. Wetlands Action Network, we decided early on we really supported the creative expression as part of what we were doing. We felt that, and I felt especially--I had been involved with protecting the Bolsa Chica Wetlands in Huntington Beach when I lived there, and I felt that we needed something other than just angry protest; that we needed to have creativity and positive sort of energy going out, and that was needed for the fact that we probably had a long haul of a campaign, for one thing.

Hanscom

Otherwise, people get just burned out, you know, reading Environmental Impact Reports and writing comments and going to hearings and not being able to speak more than two or three minutes, and sometimes not even that. There's a lot of frustration in the whole process of opposing a project or trying to even approve a project. There's a lot of frustration and burnout that happens in activism.

Hanscom

I felt that the creative energy could help keep people fresher and also provide a--you know, the two things that the news media pay attention to are--well, there's three things, I guess--sex, violence, and creative. If something's really different and creative and beautiful, it might end up on the front page of the L.A. Times. The other things, sex and violence, always do, but those weren't two of the things that we were interested in focusing on for this project. [Collings laughs.] Some people do, you know. My friend Paul Watson, who's with Sea Shepherd, he brings out Brigitte Bardot. He always says, "Sex sells," so he gets the sexy actress out there to help with the harp seals or what have you.

Hanscom

But for us it was creativity. We decided to use that as our thing that would bring attention. And interestingly, a lot of these things sort of evolved. We had this group early on in our coalition we called the Carpe Diem group; you know, "seize the day." We would just get together every week and kick around some ideas, and people would have different ideas.

Hanscom

When Jerry Rubin wanted to do his hunger strike, for instance, that was not something coordinated, not something a lot of us even supported originally. We went along because he was someone important in our coalition we wanted to support, and we felt he couldn't be just hanging out there on his own, especially--you know, I really thought that they would let him starve to death before they would give him a meeting, knowing what Hollywood was like. But he was committed to doing it, and a lot of it was people really caring about each other in the coalition and realizing we needed to support each other.

Collings

Yes. So how did you go about making contact with the different artists and actors and other people that were involved in these creative efforts?

Hanscom

The first couple of years, the first few years, I guess, we had regular meetings of our coalition. We started with the 6 groups, as I mentioned. We ended up with 126 groups by the time our coalition ended. We never expected to have that many, but our first meeting of the 6 groups, we said, "You know, we ought to see if we can get some more," because we were up against this huge thing of-

-we had to get some support in to show that we had any credibility at all. So we worked hard at getting more people. We probably had, within the first few months, 30 to 40 groups in the coalition, and then it grew slowly after that over time.

Hanscom

But we would have meetings of those groups. Up at the Earth Trust House in Malibu, every week we would have a potluck meeting. Everybody would come, and we would talk about what was happening and who was doing what. It was sort of an information sharing, and that was sort of a focal point that drew people in.

Collings

So how many people are we talking about at this point in time?

Hanscom

We would have meetings of anywhere from twenty to forty or fifty people coming together.

Collings

Representatives of these--

Hanscom

Of various groups, yes.

Collings

--now 126 groups. Okay.

Hanscom

We had to do fundraising to help support lawsuits that we were starting up, and so we'd get together and think of ideas. One of our first fundraisers was a performance by an actor who was involved with Greenpeace. He said, "You know, I'd like to offer this." Christopher Childs is his name, and he did a one-man show of Henry David Thoreau, and it was a really great thing. We did this outdoor performance up in the Santa Monica Mountains. That drew people in. All of the things we did sort of drew people in. We were just starting, really, to use the Internet as an organizing tool.

Collings

It was early.

Hanscom

Yes, it wasn't really much yet, but we did send out e-mails that got out around a little bit. I think it was the summer of '96 we did a full-page ad in the L.A. Times, a double-page spread in Daily Variety, with an open letter to DreamWorks that an anonymous donor came to us and said, "I'd like to help you get the message to DreamWorks."

Hanscom

That really laid out everything. So did they get the message? They had the opportunity. Interestingly, we had a little thing where people could respond in

the ad, and we got none from Daily Variety; none at all came back. But from the L.A. Times we had a lot of response from people who wanted to get involved. It showed me the fear in Hollywood. Nobody wanted to touch that. They were all interested and intrigued, but hands off.

Collings

It just makes you wonder what could have happened if you had managed to turn the DreamWorks group around to your point of view.

Hanscom

Yes. Well, you know, there were people who told us, "David Geffen is so stubborn that when he wants something, there's no way he's going to leave this." So we were just relieved when they finally left, because, I mean, our ideal, of course, would be that they would have come on board the idea of having a state or national park around them. That would have been great. But there were, of course, some in our group who didn't even want them to be there at all. To them, all of Ballona meant everybody out.

Hanscom

But that would have been a compromise we could have lived with on sixty or seventy acres of the thousand acres, and now we have more than that with Playa Vista. But when they pulled out completely--I think it was a Daily Variety reporter who called me and told me--I was stunned, and we had a very big party that night, because once they pulled out, then the political forces shifted, and it was only a month or two later than Antonio Villaraigosa, as speaker of the assembly, put the \$25 million into Proposition 12 that allowed us to get a willing seller to emerge at Playa Vista. That would not have happened otherwise. I mean, there were a lot of Democrats who totally supported Playa Vista that were not happy that happened, but when it did happen--he couldn't have done it at all if DreamWorks had still been involved. It just wouldn't have happened.

Collings

So what kind of discussion was there within [slight interruption due to technical difficulties] happy to have them there with a kind of a state park surrounding them. Was that a problem?

Hanscom

A little bit. I mean, our objective was to save all of the Ballona Wetlands and surrounding undeveloped open space. That was our mission. It was only when we had this opportunity to meet with Katzenberg as a result of Jerry's hunger strike that this issue even came up, because then we had to define what was undeveloped open space. Some people thought, like I did, that it meant we could offer this compromise; if they were to just keep their footprint on the already paved area, that's not undeveloped, in my view. But some people felt

the entire tract that Playa Vista owned, including that sixty-five acres or so, needed to be preserved, and that concrete needed to be taken out.

Hanscom

So it was a matter of definition. There were a couple of groups that pulled out of the coalition after that who were not happy with us. But we had agreement before we went into this meeting that that was what we were going to ask for. We had a meeting with all the coalition groups. They didn't accept it, anyway, so--

Collings

Right. Well, I guess that raises the--when you talk about how some of the groups pulled out of the coalition because they opposed your--

Collings

And it was only a couple of groups, but they were not happy.

Collings

Which groups were those?

Hanscom

Spirit of the Sage Council and--it was another group that she worked with, and I can't remember the name of it. It was an obscure group, one that I didn't know really well.

Collings

Yes. So how were your relations with Friends of the Ballona Wetlands at this time?

Hanscom

Well, Friends of the Ballona Wetlands was like Playa Vista's public relations arm to us. We were always having to meet them with journalists, not wanting to. It took a--

Collings

Why did you have to meet them with journalists?

Hanscom

Well, because they had that requirement. We would show up at a radio station, and there they would be, or a television station, there they would be. It wasn't all the time, but when there were things planned and they got wind of it, Playa Vista got wind of it, or if the journalists called Playa Vista to get their side, they would always send them to Ruth Lansford at the Friends of the Ballona Wetlands, which was really unfortunate. After we had sufficiently staked our claim on one side of the issue, and after DreamWorks left and all, we finally said that we would not show up at these things anymore. We just started telling journalists we would not show up if the Friends were there. Playa Vista needed to be there.

Hanscom

Because we didn't like the fact that it was constantly looking like it was just a struggle between environmental groups. But they had that as part of their settlement, so--and it was very contentious and very much of a problem. Even though publicly I would regularly say that if it weren't for the Friends and the work they did, we're just building on it, they weren't allowed to acknowledge our presence that way.

Collings

Because, I mean, this article here, "Eco groups at odds over DreamWorks development," Daily Variety, August 20th, 1997, it's exactly as you say. It paints it as two groups that are at odds with each other, where you have the Friends of the Ballona Wetlands saying that if DreamWorks come in, they will restore sections of the wetlands, which will then be a home to some endangered species which currently do not live there. Then you have--well, actually, you're quoted here. [Laughs] [Reads] "'There are nineteen threatened and endangered species that we'll be talking about,' Hanscom said. 'These species require the Ballona Wetlands for their home.'"

Collings

Then Ruth Lansford says, "Should the project go forward, current plans call for restoring these sections in order that these species can live here, whereas they currently don't live here now." So I think that that particular article is sort of in a nutshell what you're referring to.

Hanscom

In a way, and it wasn't accurate, what she said, either. I mean, if we'd only had 200 acres, there were a lot of species that would have--because of what Playa Vista did and the Friends--quote--"freshwater marsh," their detention basin that they tout as so wonderful.

Hanscom

What's really sad about the Friends now is that, while Playa Vista sort of had them captured all this time, Bill Gibson, a reporter at the L.A. Weekly, wrote an article in 1995 about how--he had done a lot of research on prisoners of war, and after he spoke with Ruth Lansford, he felt that she had sort of like the Stockholm syndrome type thing. She had really come to identify with her captors and was saying things that didn't sound like she used to talk. She used to say things just like we were saying, and then all of a sudden had to speak the company line. Now, you know, we had hoped after the purchase had happened that we might be able to heal this rift; that she wouldn't be bound to speaking for them as much.

Hanscom

Then we found out that DreamWorks was going to build them a new facility over on their site, a new office facility and an outdoor classroom, and they were spending millions of dollars on this thing for them so that they would continue

to support Playa Vista in Phase 2. So we haven't done that, and now what's even worse is that Playa Vista's really taken over the Friends completely. Ruth is retiring. She's been, I think--I think, from things I've heard, that it was not totally of her own desire that she's retiring.

Hanscom

There are new people on the board. The new president is the president of Psomas Corporation, which is Playa Vista's biggest consultant; designed all the roads and everything. Their new vice president is Catherine Tyrrell, who was Playa Vista's vice president for many years, who lives there now. So Playa Vista has completely taken over the Friends. There's no one on their board, with the exception of Bob [Robert] Shanman, who has any history with the organization. There are a couple of people, some Audubon people, who are on the board now, who, I think, are in the right place. But the majority of the board is Playa Vista controlled. I was hoping that it was going to be going the other way, and unfortunately, Playa Vista must feel they really need that cover or something.

Hanscom

We went to their recent annual meeting and were rather surprised. Ruth wasn't even there. There was supposed to be a turnover from one to the other, and she didn't even show up. So, anyway, she and I have a lot more in common than not, I think, at the base levels, in what we'd like to see for restoration out there. So maybe it's better that she's not tied at all to Playa Vista. I don't know.

Collings

So what is the role of the Wetlands Action Network now that the Playa Vista--DreamWorks is out, Playa Vista is built?

Hanscom

Well, Playa Vista isn't completely built, thankfully. Half of it's still under question right now, and there are a number of groups, some of which were in our coalition--Surfrider Foundation, the City of Santa Monica, the Gabrielino Shoshone Nation, Ballona Wetlands Land Trust, they're all still--they just won an appeals court decision that stopped Phase 2, so I'm not sure what's going to happen with Phase 2, which is on the other side of the buildings. Interestingly, built tiers [phonetic] to kind of go back; put their line in the sand.

Hanscom

But Wetlands Action Network is sort of doing some wetlands issues outside of this area now, primarily, and after the acquisition happened, our coalition kind of dissolved. That was sort of our last thing as a coalition, to really support the purchase. There were a few groups that didn't support it and thought we shouldn't be giving Playa Vista any money, even though we felt there was a really huge opportunity, very important window that might not come again, to get this bigger chunk of land preserved.

Hanscom

So after the purchase happened, we are kind of really focused more on the education and restoration. There's still some work to do to preserve some additional areas besides what Playa Vista owns. Like there's a privately owned parcel at Del Rey Lagoon here. There's a part of the bluff face that is near the wetlands. There's a confluence of land where Centinela Creek and Ballona Creek come together that is at risk. So we're educating people about those things. We have a committee under the Ballona Institute called the Committee to Complete the Park. The whole idea is to get these additional acreages into the park area and to bring State Parks in to be the eventual manager of this site, because right now the Ballona Wetlands are owned by a couple of different state agencies, and it's not all being coordinated to the best possible use.

Collings

So what would be the relationship between that and the Ecological Reserve?

Hanscom

Well, the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve is currently managed by the California Department of Fish and Game. They actually have a new person here now, who's finally paying some attention, which is good, but we think that the State Parks Department has even a higher mandate for protection, and maybe they will come in and work with the Fish and Game Department, which is mostly a regulator to make sure the endangered species are protected and all. But State Parks has a broader public mandate to help educate. They have interpreters, and we think in an area like Los Angeles we need that; that we can't just have a couple of trails. We really need to have guided tours, and we really need to have some honoring and respect of the historical areas, too, here.

Hanscom

We have an old Red Car trolley line, for instance, that goes right through the middle of the Ballona Wetlands that would be interesting to bring back as an interpretive thing; to not just show people there used to be a Red Car here, but actually get some people on it instead of on the highway. It could go between Playa del Rey and Marina del Rey. There's a lot of Native American burial sites here. State Parks is also really concerned about historical native sites, and they would put displays together that would be appropriate.

Hanscom

So we really want to complete the park, which--whenever there's a public purchase, there's a lot more work to be done. In fact, it's just as much work, it seems, as going up against a development. You've got all the agencies to figure out now, and who's really going to be in charge, and what's the best way to do it. So that's kind of why we have this outpost here of Ballona Institute. We lead nature walks. Wetlands Action Network had done that for some time, and they

still do the first Sunday of the month tour, but then Ballona Institute has added in we're training docents here, getting more people involved.

Hanscom

So it's sort of an expansion of the work. Also, we have a library archive that we're opening up. One of our directors is a biologist who is a scientist and activist, which is a little unusual, and he has done a lot of research on the historical--what used to be here, the flora and fauna and landscape. We want to make that information available to the public.

Collings

One of the slogans for the institute, we were talking about it, "Research, renovation, education, and artistic expression." Why is it important to have artistic expression as part of the work of the Ballona Institute?

Hanscom

That comes out of the work that Wetlands Action Network and the coalition did with Ballona here. A number of people who helped start the Ballona Institute were involved with the artistic expression that happened during the Ballona campaign. We just felt that that needs to be a continued part of any work at Ballona, because from that book there that this incredible photographer who came--

Collings

Wild Birds of the American Wetlands.

Hanscom

Yes. There's an artist [Rosalie Winard] who does infrared photography, and she came here. We just think that artistic expression is something that can reach an audience that maybe isn't as reachable with the dry scientific data. The scientists that we have involved with Ballona Institute also agree with that. They think that artistic expression is really an important part of activism and educating the public.

Collings

Okay. And did Ed Begley, Jr., come back to the Ballona struggle?

Hanscom

He did, as did Jamie Cromwell. Both of them have appeared at some of Sheila Laffey's film screenings and have both expressed their guilt over not being involved earlier and really honoring some of the activists that did get involved. Ed even came out when the state controller, Kathleen Connell, helped us to secure the first 73 acres of the 600 acres. It was really the first part of the land that really was solidly in public hands, before the rest of the purchase happened. She refused to extend the option one more time to Playa Vista. They were far in arrears on their taxes and a number of obligations they had to make, and she said, "You know, you have till next week."

Hanscom

They didn't come through, and so she said, "We're reclaiming this land." So she and Ed came out with us to a really great event, where we took down the "Private Property" signs and pulled down the fence and cleaned up the property, all kinds of stuff that had been dumped for years that Playa Vista had let happen. Ed was just great there. He said, "You know, I wish I'd been involved more, but, you know, I'm here now, and you guys are all great that you stuck with it. You did more than I ever thought you could," and he's one of our continued supporters, so that's good.

Collings

Was there ever any involvement of the community of Playa del Rey?

Hanscom

Absolutely. When Wetlands Action Network was up in Malibu, we always had a big base of support here in Playa del Rey and Westchester, Marina del Rey, Mar Vista. The surrounding communities here have always been concerned about the wetlands, and continue to be. I'm really glad to live here now. I've lived here about four years now, and a lot of the people who come on our nature tours are from the area. We get people from outside of the area as well, but the people here have become more educated and really care about it. I've gone to a couple of open houses here where the real estate brokers, they realize the wetlands actually is something that helps increase the investment value of the homes near here. One of them said to me, "You've got to go up on the roof and look out over the bird paradise." [Laughter]

Hanscom

I thought, "Well, that's a nice marketing term." You know, people don't know necessarily what a wetland is, but a bird paradise, that sounds good.

Collings

Yes.

Hanscom

That's what she uses to sell her homes. [End of interview]

1.3. Session 3 (June 5, 2008)

Collings

Today is June 5th, 2008, Jane Collings interviewing Marcia Hanscom at her office.

Collings

Marcia, I thought one of the things that we could talk about today was just get a little bit more into some of the stories behind organizing your community effort.

Hanscom

Okay.

Collings

I wanted to just start off with just sort of a general question and ask you, what is the most important thing to keep in mind when organizing a community?

Hanscom

Well, for me, I've learned that it's crucial to not really be attached to the outcome. That might sound counterintuitive, because we have a goal in mind in any campaign of what we want, but the more attached to the outcome one is, the more devastating it can be when something doesn't go your way. So I think for me it's been about learning to speak up for nature and to put that in the context of, "Well, I might not convince this person or this elected official or this commission or city council, but every time we do speak for nature, we're shifting consciousness a bit and changing a little bit of the community's perspective and educating," which is really what happened over an eight-year period in the Ballona Wetlands campaign. It was a real shift in the whole political discussion, and that only happened by taking it a little bit at a time and realizing that this is a long-term prospect.

Collings

So, yes, because that sort of leads into another thing that I wanted to ask you about, was like how much of this campaign would you say was really specifically about the Ballona Wetlands, and how much of it was about raising consciousness on this issue generally? Because I notice that a lot of the signs that protesters were carrying, for example, would point to the fact that 95 percent of wetlands in the United States were gone. So there seemed to be like this sort of like dual focus. Would that be correct?

Hanscom

Well, it's hard to unconnect them, because if you've destroyed so much of a certain habitat and you don't have much left, then every little bit is necessary to protect. I think that was the underlying thinking behind why people would utilize that argument of how much we don't have left. At the same time, it is about the larger perspective, too. We don't have much open space. We don't have much nature in the city.

Hanscom

I guess that to me is maybe why so many people in Los Angeles did resonate with this issue and got engaged, because there's sort of like a line in the sand we've crossed, I think, especially in very dense urban environments, where we need that connection with nature for our own survival, I believe. I think that people who are--you know, when people get out of the city and find themselves in nature, it's such a stark contrast to those who already live in a rural area and nearby nature, and that to me shows how much we need it. I think we've gotten so far away from it in the cities that people really resonate toward the fact that

we don't have as much in our cities, and we need to really keep that perspective.

Hanscom

So, I mean, I think it's connected. I don't think it's really two messages. I think it's really connected.

Collings

One of the things that Dorothy Green said about organizing Heal the Bay was that she found it to be so easy to get people involved because people had what appeared to be some sort of really deep connection to the ocean and just couldn't stand the idea of a sick bay. This was, you know, part of the rationale behind the name, Heal the Bay. You're pointing to something similar.

Hanscom

Yes, I think so. There's a rather new movement out, based on a book called Last Child in the Woods, about nature deficit disorder, they call it.

Collings

Yes, I've heard that. Yes.

Hanscom

And I think that's what people are starting to realize, that children need places to just go play in the wild; that we all do. And that especially if--there was a real pivotal moment for me in the campaign, early on, when I decided to stay, and that I was going to really stay in L.A. and Ballona would be a key issue for me, because I really had thought when I started Wetlands Action Network that I would probably move to Northern California or somewhere where it seemed to me there were more people on the same page as I was in terms of wanting to spend a lot of energy protecting nature.

Hanscom

Then I went to a Solstice ceremony in the Santa Monica Mountains that I was invited to. We were all divided up into different groups, and I was in a group where there was a woman sitting next to me who was from Inglewood, and she started crying. I said, "What's wrong? Are you okay?"

Hanscom

She said, "It's just so beautiful here. This is the first time I've ever been in nature."

Collings

Wow.

Hanscom

She was obviously so moved, and it moved me to the point where I thought, "Well, Inglewood is really close to the Ballona Wetlands, and right now it's a private area. If it were public and people knew about it, she wouldn't have maybe had to go her whole life--she was in her mid-forties, and she had never been surrounded by nature. That's a crime." So I felt like we had to do more to

protect nature in the city. There are places that are still remnants of our natural history here that we need to do everything we can to preserve.

Collings

Right. Well, that sort of leads me to asking you about the communities that you drew on for this protest movement, for this activist movement. Where did the people come from, geographically, who participated the most?

Hanscom

Well, hmm. They were really all over. We were up against such a political machine that Playa Vista had that it was very difficult for us to get people involved originally, and so we went everywhere we could, everywhere there was a crowd of people. I can remember when we first started FrogWorks, which was a political street theater group that had a great sort of skit that they would put on. We would go to the Third Street promenade in Santa Monica. We would go to the Venice boardwalk. We would go to schools or anyone who would have us. Bruce Robertson with the Ballona Valley Preservation League started a speakers bureau. He just had students calling different organizations to get a spot to go make a speech and talk about it. It was really anyplace and anywhere we could get.

Hanscom

Originally we were a pretty ragtag group, I have to say; you know, people like the Gray Panthers and--you know. We were having a difficult time getting traction with the large environmental groups, in part because many of them had funding from Hollywood and didn't want to go up against DreamWorks; were afraid of the fact that they had gotten involved, or maybe wary, I should say. So we really started out with as many small organizations as possible and built from there. We did have some large organizations, like Sierra Club and Surfrider Foundation, California Public Interest Research Group, CALPIRG. They were with us pretty early on. But it was really a regionwide effort, and we even had organizations like the Center for Biological Diversity, that was based out of Arizona, that we got involved. We got others involved that weren't maybe as tightly connected to the Los Angeles political arena.

Collings

So can you point to any particular groups that wouldn't back you because of the donations that they were receiving from the Hollywood establishment?

Hanscom

Well, I don't know if they would admit that that was why, but it was pretty clear, especially when we met with Jeffrey Katzenberg, and many of them were around the table, invited by him to try and make us look a little more marginalized, shall we say. NRDC was one, National Resources Defense Council; Heal the Bay, and Heal the Bay was--you know, Mark Gold would say to me, "Well, it's not because David Geffen gives us money." But perhaps

for them it was more that Playa Vista was very smart in hiring a lot of consultants who were on Heal the Bay's board. So there were those two, in particular, stayed on the fence for a very long time.

Hanscom

Originally, Ruth Galanter, our city councilperson, would say that they were supportive, and the more we pushed, the more they would back off of that and say, "Well, we're not really supportive of Playa Vista, but we're going to wait until Phase 2 to see how things go." Both of those organizations ultimately ended up helping us with the legislation we needed to get the purchase to happen, but it didn't happen till the very end, really, and they never did join our coalition. So it was a challenge politically for them.

Hanscom

At the same time, I think that what we did not only provided a model but allowed Heal the Bay, for the very first time that I know of, to get involved with a land-use issue. They would say, with Playa Vista, the reason they couldn't get involved was--

Collings

Because it was land use.

Hanscom

--it was a land-use issue. People like Surfrider Foundation and Santa Monica Baykeeper would say, "But wait a minute. The watershed is connected to the bay, and how can they say that?" And, in fact, eventually, about a year and a half to two years before we got the purchase to happen, Heal the Bay, modeling after what we did, put together a coalition to work to save Ahmanson Ranch.

Collings

Right. I was just going to say that, yes.

Hanscom

Yes, and some of the organizers told us, they came to our town hall meetings and said, "We're going to do the same kind of thing. This is good, what you're doing." So Ahmanson Ranch was much further from the bay than Playa Vista.

Collings

Right. But they had the idea that it was the headwaters.

Hanscom

Right. Right. Well, it seems to me you want to get everything in the watershed protected, and especially the things that are so close. I mean, Ballona Wetlands are really part of the bay. They've got the estuary that connects with the bay, twice a day, with the tides coming in and out. So, you know, it was interesting. But I felt good that what we did helped make some space for them to do that, because Ahmanson was a very important place to preserve as well, and they were really floundering without a lot of political support originally, also.

Collings

So do you think that they particularly wouldn't get involved because of the donations, or do you think that they just weren't there organizationally at that point?

Hanscom

I think it was because of their board members who were consultants for Playa Vista. I think Mark Gold was caught in the middle of it. And I think that Dorothy Green, who was very close to Ruth Lansford--they were kind of organizing their respective organizations at the same time in their careers, and I think that Dorothy respected Ruth and didn't want to get in the way of her settlement.

Hanscom

I think a lot of people thought, really did think, that it was the best environmental settlement possible; that there was no more--you know, there was sort of a political reality people had. "We can't get more than that." And, in fact, there hadn't been a parks bond measure in many years that had passed. There was a Republican administration in Sacramento that wasn't interested in helping preserve more land. So we really had to work to convince people that we could make our own political reality, and that we could shift things, which we did, but some people didn't believe it till it happened.

Hanscom

Heal the Bay graciously, in their newsletter, after the purchase happened, conceded that it was a really good thing, and like I said, they did help with the legislation in the background. And they graciously honored both the efforts of Ruth Lansford and her group and what we did here.

Collings

So how were you operating, you know, with or sort of around or in spite of or what have you, with Friends of the Ballona Wetlands? I mean, here you had two groups on the ground with different aims, essentially.

Hanscom

Well, yes, we had a lot of groups, actually, on the ground with different aims than the Friends. The Friends were pretty much, along with Audubon, who had made an earlier deal, had pretty much had a certain thing they had to do, and they were required, according to their settlement agreement, not only to support the development and support the deal, but they also were required to--and they will say, "Well, we didn't have to support it," but there were clauses in the agreement that said they did. So if they had not, I think they would have been taken to court.

Hanscom

They also had clauses that said if a letter to the editor was written by anyone opposing their position, that they were required to write in opposition to that. They were required to speak out in opposition to anyone speaking out against

Playa Vista. So they had a settlement agreement that a lot of us felt was very reactionary, you know, something that an environmental group ought not to have signed. Now, we weren't there when they signed it or didn't know what happened during that whole ten years of negotiations they went through, and they thought it was the best deal they could get at the time.

Hanscom

But it was very difficult, because Playa Vista really pushed them into almost a war with us. It was very ugly at times, very disconcerting. I mean, it was terrible to wake up on a Sunday morning and see a really horrible opinion piece in the Los Angeles Times being targeted toward me personally.

Collings

Oh, gosh.

Hanscom

It wasn't a fun thing. I had to really steel myself to keep focused on speaking up for nature and for a new possibility of a greater amount of land that we could acquire, and not get sucked into that was very challenging at times.

Collings

So, you mean, you're really in sort of a unique situation here in the Los Angeles area, in that, on the one hand, you have the Hollywood community operating as both antagonist and protagonist. You've got, obviously, DreamWorks as a huge obstacle, but on the other hand, you've got people such as Martin Sheen or Ed Begley, Jr., and probably others, stepping forward and attracting a lot of media attention.

Hanscom

Well, it was a long time in coming before any of them would speak out. Ed Begley didn't really speak out until we had--even though he was originally in our coalition, he asked to be taken out almost immediately--

Collings

Right.

Hanscom

--when DreamWorks got involved, as he got pressured to do so. He really got back involved again once Kathleen Connell, the state controller, helped us to acquire and secure the first seventy acres at Ballona.

Collings

And this was after DreamWorks had backed out.

Hanscom

It was well after DreamWorks backed out. Now, Martin Sheen did speak out beforehand. He and Ed Asner both did, but it took a lot of effort to get them to do that. We had spoken with many other Hollywood people, thinking that they would get involved with us. Some said they would and a week later would call back and say, "No, we can't."

Collings

And this was even after DreamWorks had backed out?

Hanscom

No, this was while DreamWorks was involved. The first person that really said they would and stuck with it was Ed Asner, who ended up doing the narration for Sheila Laffey's film, *The Last Stand*. When we met with him in his office, Michael Tobias, who's a very well known documentary filmmaker, and Sheila Laffey and I met with him, and he said, "You know, this is not easy, even for someone like me who's been around a long time. These guys are very powerful people in Hollywood, and if I do this, I know what I may be bringing on me." So it was not without a great amount of courage that he did step forward and agree to help.

Hanscom

Then Martin Sheen, his involvement was quite some time after that. DreamWorks was still involved, but it was toward the end of their involvement. Valerie Sklarevsky, who organized the action with him--she is a good friend of his and has been arrested with him for civil disobedience things many times. She had spoken with him for some time, and he really, I think, kind of burst the illusion, perhaps, that it wasn't--the illusion that "you will never work in this town again." It didn't happen with him, because this was before *West Wing* even when he did this. Then he went on to a greater career than he had had, I think, in the past, with his success with *West Wing*. So it showed that it didn't necessarily mean--his speaking out was not necessarily a bad thing.

Hanscom

However, Playa Vista was very smart. They did not allow him to be arrested as they had others for doing similar things.

Collings

Oh, how did they manage that?

Hanscom

Well, shall we say they have a lot of political clout. I mean, I guess it's up to the person charging someone whether they're going to press charges, and they basically pleaded with the police not to press charges. You know, they came; the police came, but they didn't do anything to him, mostly because Playa Vista didn't want that on the front pages of the *L.A. Times* or on the television news. Maybe a small clip might have gone on, but it would have been much bigger if he had actually been arrested, which he was willing to risk that. I mean, he's someone who knows how to do civil disobedience actions and what the consequences are, that you may have to stay in jail a few nights.

Hanscom

So anyway, it was interesting he was the first one doing a civil disobedience action that did not get--

Collings

What was his particular civil disobedience action?

Hanscom

Well, he came with three women, Mary Wright, who is an artist; Valerie Sklarevsky; and Michelle Syptert, an attorney. The four of them did a walk and a protest to Playa Vista's building, and they took a big chain and locked the doors. [Collings laughs.] All on camera, and they just sat there. They pounded on the door, and they asked for the president of Playa Vista to come out, and he didn't. You know, they just sort of tried to ignore it. So, you know, finally the police came and unlocked the door.

Collings

Now, were his companions arrested?

Hanscom

No.

Collings

No. Okay. All right. So you said that you had gone to a number of people in the Hollywood community. Why did you do that?

Hanscom

Well, because we were trying to get some awareness of what our concern was, and we knew that there were a number of people in Hollywood who did have strong conviction about the environment, and we thought that might help us to get the word out, because the entire message that was out there was, "Oh, DreamWorks is coming in. This is a great thing. They're going to restore the wetlands." I mean, that was their story, that they were going to help the environment, not that they were paving over the wetlands. So we felt we had to do something to try and change that message.

Hanscom

Ultimately, our litigation and lawsuits were the one thing that the press would cover that showed that there was a challenge out there, and that things might not be as the story line said.

Collings

Yes, the news coverage was very much, as you say, about how progressive this development was and what a great economic benefit it would be. Then, of course, this is coming on the heels of the downturn of the aerospace industry--

Hanscom

Right.

Collings

--and was pitched very much as a way to revive the L.A. area economy and make it a kind of a--you know, almost a Silicon Valley type environment.

Hanscom

Right. When the announcement was first made, everyone from IBM to Bank of America, UCLA, USC, everybody was going to be involved in this development. It was unbelievable. Within six months, almost all of them dropped out as they saw how unsolid the whole development really was. It was really a house of cards that has slowly crumpled here and there.

Collings

Yes. Yes. Well, I think one of the things that was interesting in the documentary, Last Stand, is how there's some effort there to sort of pitch the fishing industry as an alternate economic engine. I'm just wondering, I mean, did your coalition like reach out to that industry, or was it really more kind of a conservation campaign?

Hanscom

Well, it was both. We had been involved with a coalition called Campaign to Save California Wetlands, which was groups of wetland friends and protectors up and down the state who are trying to get a stronger Clean Water Act in Washington [D.C.] that would protect wetlands further than the Clean Water Act currently does. We had been involved with putting out a report where we had worked with a number of fishing industry folks, explaining how a wetland is really like a nursery to the small fish. As they go out into the bay, they come into the wetlands for growing up. Sometimes a juvenile halibut will be there for several years before it's big enough to go out to sea.

Hanscom

So the fishing economic part of this was always something we were aware of, but we also were attempting to explain something that I think has become more acknowledged since the disaster at Katrina, with the Katrina hurricane in Louisiana, and that is that wetlands offer a number of different benefits for our greater society that people don't think about. Certainly the one that maybe most people do understand is that it's home to rare and endangered species. In fact, in California more than 55 percent of our rare and endangered species are dependent on wetlands for some part of their life cycle.

Hanscom

But there is also the flood protection, the storm protection that wetlands serve, and besides fishing, there is also a very, very big economic value to wetlands as a wildlife viewing and ecotourism component. The US Fish and Wildlife Service just put out a CD about that that talks about all of the economic benefits that come to a region. Bird watchers alone spend millions of dollars just going from one place to another to look for birds they haven't seen in their lives. It's an amazing amount of money that can come if you really market the area correctly.

Hanscom

That's one of the things we've been talking with the county about. In the Marina, the Marina del Rey immediately adjacent to the Ballona Wetlands, which people don't realize was once part of the Ballona Wetlands and was paved over and dug out so that the marina could be built, but there is still a significant amount of wildlife in the water and in the trees near the water that connect with the wetlands. The great blue herons, the snowy egrets, the black crown night herons, all nest in the marina, and they come and feed, find their nest sticks, and those sorts of things in the wetland areas. But they actually nest and have their babies and their young in the marina. If the marina and both the city and the county would focus more on marketing that tremendous thing, they could fill up the hotel rooms more and get more revenue from that. It's unfortunate that nature for nature's sake isn't as valued as I think it ought to be, but for those who need a dollar value, I think that wetlands also provide that for the community.

Collings

So, I mean, it's sounding like the campaign itself was a conservation effort. The public face of the campaign had to do with promoting the importance of maintaining this natural area for its own sake, and that sort of ancillary to that and almost like after that, you also have these other--I don't know--arguments, I suppose, that have to do with sustaining the fishing industry and sustaining ecotourism.

Hanscom

Yes, I think that's the case, and that's because the decision makers are of all stripes, so it means some are more concerned about the economic values and some are more concerned about--you know, really understand the intrinsic value of nature.

Collings

Yes. Now, you did have, toward the end, some support from Maxine Waters and also Steve Cooley. How did they become involved? I mean, I'm sorry--Steve Westly. How did they become involved and what did they bring to this campaign?

Hanscom

Well, Maxine Waters got involved because of the Native American graves that were being desecrated.

Collings

At which point was that taking place?

Hanscom

Well, this was after the 600 acres of land was purchased that Maxine Waters got involved. She had heard from constituents that there was this concern from the Native Americans, and she came out to look at it. Some of the residents here convinced her to come out to take a look at the site for herself. She was

just shocked when she saw that there were hundreds of burials being taken out of the ground for Playa Vista's development, and there's still a very big concern about that, about how those burials and grave goods have been treated, how the Native Americans have been treated in the whole process. It's one of the largest gravesites that's ever been uncovered, and it was just--we had a lot of religious leaders actually come out for a news conference at the site, because it was still rather unbelievable that it was allowed to continue.

Hanscom

It's one of the biggest concerns of our current city councilman, Bill Rosendahl, who is working hard to try and get some relief for the native people and to find out where all of these--they've shipped different bones to different study places. I mean, it's just totally not honoring especially the fact that the native people, this is part of their religion. It's part of who they are, to respect their ancestors, much more so than we do in our culture even. So it's kind of a double kick in the face to them, and Bill Rosendahl is trying really hard to get some relief for that.

Hanscom

Steve Westly got involved as the state controller, in part because his predecessor, Kathleen Connell, actually did an amazing thing. There's a complexity about this land that's very challenging, but part of it is what is known as Area C, which is the land north of Ballona Creek and east of Lincoln Boulevard. That particular parcel of land was slated for development by Playa Vista, always has been, but when Gray Davis was controller a number of years ago, he actually took that land and set it aside for a little while, because Howard Hughes and his heirs had not been able to pay the inheritance tax debt, not only on this land but on a number of other real estate areas that he owned prior to his death.

Hanscom

So there was this tax debt to the State of California, and Gray Davis took this land, put it under the controller's office, and then, seemingly to us, it was sort of odd, because still Playa Vista had the right to get it back as long as they paid these payments. It didn't quite make sense to us, because then they weren't having to pay property tax on it, either, all this time. So we've never liked that deal once we found out it [the land] really wasn't even owned by Playa Vista. It took us a number of years to find that out.

Hanscom

Once we found out it was really on the state books, we appealed to Kathleen Connell, and when she decided to run for the mayor of Los Angeles, she asked a number of environmental leaders what we wanted with that. So once she understood it, she basically told Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs, who by then owned Playa Vista, "You've either got to come up with all your back

taxes, or the monies that you agreed to pay, and do it by January, or I'm taking the land back, and you won't have the option anymore to purchase it." They thought she would just extend the option as controllers had in the past, including her. They thought it was a bluff, and they didn't, for some reason, want to put more money in, and so that was the first part of Ballona that actually was preserved.

Hanscom

So she came out and proclaimed that this is now the people's land. There's no option to purchase it back any longer. Playa Vista's lawyers sort of argued with that a little bit, and by the time Steve Westly became the controller, he was in a position to actually make the transition of taking Area C and transferring it to the California Department of Fish and Game, which is what he did.

Hanscom

So it was great. It was sort of the two controllers in a row helping out the people and making something that no one thought was possible. I mean, everybody, even the people who were trying to save more west of Lincoln, never thought we would get that parcel of land. And it's very important, because there are two rare plant populations there that are found nowhere else in Ballona, and one of those plants, the southern tar plant, is on the verge of extinction in Southern California. So it's a very important parcel of land to have preserved.

Collings

Now, why did she decide to play hardball with them at that point?

Hanscom

Well, that's a good question. She had a history with Playa Vista that went back, it turned out. Her prior husband, I believe, worked for Kaufman and Broad. Maybe he was Kaufman; I'm not sure. But he had something to do with that parcel of land, and originally Kaufman and Broad had wanted that when Playa Vista got to have the option from Gray Davis. So it could have been something between Gray Davis and Kathleen Connell. There was known political tension between the two of them for many years, so it might have been part of that. But I do really believe she wanted to help the environmental community, too. I mean, she was running for mayor again, and we utilized that opportunity.

Hanscom

When an elected official is running for office, their ears seem to be a lot more open, and hers were. She came out on a tour. She fell in love with the great blue heron. She just thought that was the most magnificent thing she'd ever seen. Her two sons were verging on teenage years; a little bit younger than that, but they both were--one of them, in particular, was very interested in nature. So she asked our biologist if he would take them on a tour and help them with a class

project. She kind of really got interested in Ballona on a personal level, and that's unusual for a politician, so we took advantage of that and encouraged it.

Collings

Yes, maybe one of her sons--maybe her son was the one that talked her into it.

Hanscom

It's certainly possible. I know that Arnold Schwarzenegger gives credit to his children for getting the condor on the California quarter, so I think that sometimes--you know, that's why we focus a lot on educating children here, too, because the next generation is very vital to our future as a planet.

Collings

We were just talking before we started the tape recorder, or whatever we call this now, about sort of what a unique community this is. There are no convenience stores. There are no chain stores. It's an eclectic community of a sort. What kind of involvement did the local community here have in the struggle to save the Ballona Wetlands?

Hanscom

Well, if I had known this community better myself, I might have moved here earlier. Playa del Rey is a very interesting community, and I'm really glad to live here now, having lived here for about three and a half years now. I see it as just a gem. It's really a little beach town that kind of never has gotten into the strip mall chain mentality, and in fact, the community here is really clearly wanting to hang onto that. I mean, there are things that need to be done here to clean up the community here and there, but people want to maintain this character, this beach community character.

Hanscom

And it's interesting, because like I've gone to a couple of open houses here where the real estate brokers really understand the unique thing that Ballona Wetlands offers to the people who live in the area. One of them said to me when I went, "Oh, go up on the roof, and make sure you look out. You'll see there's a bird paradise over there." A bird paradise; that's a really interesting way of putting it.

Collings

She didn't know who you were.

Hanscom

No, she didn't know who we were at all. That was how she marketed and saw the wetlands, it's a bird paradise. Obviously, the views that a lot of people have are--people constructed their homes so that they can have a view of the area, and it's good for their housing values, I think. The apartment building I live in, the outside marquee has a couple of herons painted on it. People really get that this is a nice gem of nature here, and that's part of why they like living here. It's

part of why people like driving through the area. It's not the same as getting on the freeway.

Collings

Right. But did people here from this community get involved?

Hanscom

Some did. Some did. I think that a lot more would today, only because we've now been going on ten years of doing nature tours and nature walks every month, and a lot of the members of the community here have gone on those and learned more about how important this place is and why. So if we'd had that back in 1995, I think even more people from here would have gotten involved. But we certainly had members of the community involved. Playa del Rey and Westchester both had significant support.

Hanscom

But we also had support from people in Pacific Palisades, Santa Monica, people who drove through here, Mar Vista, they all saw this as a gem. It's so different than the rest of the West Side.

Collings

Yes. Well, we know that Mayor Riordan and the city council at that time supported Playa Vista because of what it would do in terms of tax base; Ruth Galanter. But were there any neighborhood associations around here who supported Playa Vista because of what it might bring to the community?

Hanscom

Well, there really weren't any neighborhood councils or associations at that time. When the Neighborhood Council for Westchester-Playa Vista was-- Westchester-Playa del Rey was being formed, there were actually a lot of people from this area concerned that they didn't want Playa Vista to take over that, and so there was a big slate of people planning to run for it. There were so many people that showed up, because they were concerned and didn't want Playa Vista to be running things, the election didn't end up happening. Playa Vista and its supporters, including the gas company, which was where this meeting was held, closed down the meeting and said, "We don't have enough ballots."

Hanscom

It's because they saw that it was a real organized community here, wanting to make sure they had a say, and Playa Vista's Phase 2 hadn't been approved yet. So Playa Vista took their own little organizing and went back to the drawing board, and a couple of years later they managed to take over the election. They basically bused in all of their temporary employees and offered them dinner and drinks. It's well known in the city that our Neighborhood Council here is owned and operated by Playa Vista and doesn't really reflect the community.

Hanscom

By the same token, there are some community members who do support Playa Vista, and mostly because of their own self-interest. Playa Vista has spent a lot of money giving money and giving time to various organizations in the community in an effort to buy their support, and they have done that to some extent, but the overwhelming majority of people in this area do not support Playa Vista.

Collings

So the Neighborhood Council, I mean, why was it formed around that time? Was it formed in response to Playa Vista, or was it just a coincidence?

Hanscom

No, it just happened to be that this was when all the neighborhood councils were being formed in the city, and when that happened, like I said, the people who were opposed to Playa Vista, which I do believe is the majority of both Playa del Rey and Westchester, they all formed a coalition and said, "We're going to make sure that we take back our community."

Hanscom

There was a shift in politics, and Bill Rosendahl, when he ran for city council, opposing Playa Vista and supporting the community was one of his biggest platforms. In spite of a significant amount of money Playa Vista put in, including Rob [Robert] Maguire and Steve Soboroff putting lots of their own individual money in at the end to try and defeat him, he won by quite a margin.

Collings

Based on that issue, do you think?

Hanscom

I think that was a big part of it. I do. I was asked, as a Sierra Club leader, because Sierra Club had endorsed Bill Rosendahl, I was asked to do one of those phone call things the very last day, all the Democrats in the district, and you know, people knew I was a leader in that.

Hanscom

Interestingly, the Republicans were given Richard Riordan to make the calls to. [Laughs] So there are some Republicans in the district, too, but I think we have an overwhelming Democratic majority in this area.

Collings

So, I mean, is it fair to say that in the beginning you utilized these kind of interesting protests, FrogWorks and the like, to raise awareness, and then the actual action, effective action against Playa Vista, came through the lawsuit and through the support of people like Bill Rosendahl, who came on board as perhaps some of these local middle-class and upper middle-class community members came around to this position as well?

Hanscom

Well, first of all, Bill Rosendahl, while he completely supports our position, the purchase happened before he got in office. So it was others who really pushed that, although he is really helping us to try and secure what we have and to expand the park, to some degree. And he's also trying to stand up for what's right at Playa Vista with what's still at play, because there are about 150 acres still in question there.

Hanscom

But, yes, I guess the way I would say what you summed up rather well, is that our movement grew up politically. In the beginning we had no choice but to-- you know, people were saying, "Well, why would you have people lock down to the bulldozers in protest?"

Collings

You're talking about Celia Alario.

Hanscom

Celia Alario.

Collings

Talk about that in a little bit, but go ahead.

Hanscom

Yes. I mean, that was all we had. First of all, we had nothing to sue over that we knew of, originally, initially. We knew that Phase 1 had already been approved. Of course, then when DreamWorks came in, Phase 1 got approved again, so we did file a lawsuit there over that. We didn't have any political support except for from Tom Hayden, who was probably the only elected official in the area who had read the entire Environmental Impact Report, and when he read it, he said, "This is not acceptable."

Hanscom

But most people were just taking the "greenwashing," the story line that, "Well, DreamWorks, why would they get involved with something bad?" And, of course, you know, "The Friends of the Ballona Wetlands have signed off, so it must be good, because they've fought for a long time." It was very difficult to do much of anything against that story line. So we just did the basic solid grassroots organizing that we could, petitions. We had people standing out on Culver and Jefferson, passing out flyers to the traffic that was going by, saying, "Help us." We were sort of desperate at that point.

Hanscom

It took a number of years to get to a point where we could approach the political establishment, and it really took DreamWorks getting out before we had much traction there. I mean, it wasn't for not trying, but we just couldn't get anywhere while DreamWorks was there. They had too much influence with the Democratic Party because of their fundraising.

Collings

Yes. So what are some of the other ways that you did the grassroots community organizing? I mean, passing out flyers, raising awareness with the theater troupe, FrogWorks.

Hanscom

Letter-writing campaigns, petitions. We did a very big petition to the Army Corps of Engineers, which Polly Pearlman, who was one of our great activists--she has passed away since--she and I went to Washington and delivered a stack several feet high of petitions to the head of the Army Corps of Engineers at the Pentagon, who we knew actually had sympathy toward protecting wetlands. We knew that his department had approved the first phase of Playa Vista, and we thought there were flaws in that. We thought that he might be able to help us. He did come out and look at the site.

Hanscom

We just appealed to every possible place we could. A lot of letter writing, letters to the editor. Basic information sharing, going out and doing the speaking circuit. Bruce Robertson, his visuals that he put together, that was what convinced me to get involved, and then we convinced a lot of other people, too. When he did these big maps and showed exactly what was being protected, it was not what everybody was saying. It was not what everybody was saying in terms of what the impact would be. Once you see it on a map, and you see 30,000 new people coming in, and 28 percent increase in traffic on the 405 Freeway, 86 percent increase in traffic on Lincoln Boulevard, not too many people thought we could handle that.

Hanscom

But you had to pull those numbers and information out of the materials that were there to educate people. Then we started getting scientists involved, too. Dr. Joy [B.] Zedler and Wayne Ferren, two of the top wetlands scientists in the West, we got them to write declarations for our lawsuits. We were able to find some rather curious things that had happened with consultants that Playa Vista had hired in the past and were able to get some of those scientists to explain what happened. That helped us win our federal lawsuit, where the judge basically said the Army Corps of Engineers had covered up some things and not done the review the way it ought to have been, and they didn't listen to the experts.

Hanscom

So there was that going on, and at the same time there were a lot of activists who were just so concerned once the bulldozers started. The bulldozers were in starts and stops, starts and stops, depending on the financial problems that Playa Vista was having at the time. So there were probably a dozen to fifteen, people total who at one time or another went in and locked themselves down to bulldozers, Celia Alario being the first one when the bulldozing first started.

Hanscom

She was just devastated, because she had done a lot of the analyzing of the Environmental Impact Report, and she knew what was there. And all of a sudden, they were bulldozing in an area that no one knew anything about them having any permits in. She said, "This can't be. We've got to stop it." So she went out and decided to try and stop it in a way that might actually bring some attention to the area.

Collings

So what exactly did she do?

Hanscom

Well, she went out, apparently, early one morning and locked herself at the neck with a bicycle chain to a bulldozer, so that by the time the bulldozer operator got there later that morning, he wouldn't be able to start it up. She had someone filming it, and she had someone watching from afar who had a key, I understand, in case there was some kind of emergency. But she was prepared to be there all day, and she was there for hours before the fire department came and kind of decided they had to unlock her somehow. It's not an easy thing to do, I don't think. But she had had training in civil disobedience, working to try and save redwoods up in the redwood forest, and so she knew what she was doing and was well prepared going into it.

Collings

This was covered by the local media.

Hanscom

Yes, that's why she had someone filming it. I'm told that whoever it was that was filming it, I guess, got copies down to the television stations right away, so it ended up on the news. And it just happened to be--we had been working with NBC news on a broadcast that Tom Brokaw was going to be doing that night. It was the day of the primary for the presidential election in--let's see; 1996, it would have been, so it was like the second term of Bill [William J.] Clinton. So it ended up not only on our local news, but it ended up on the national NBC news with Brokaw making a mention of it with his piece.

Collings

You said that there were a number of other people who also chained themselves to bulldozers.

Hanscom

Yes, there were--I don't know--a month later or so, there were a few, like three together that did, and then Valerie Sklarevsky, Martin Sheen's friend, she came in once. She didn't lock herself to a bulldozer, but she got up in this really beautiful white dress with a whole basket of flowers and sat on this bulldozer. I guess they didn't know what to do with her. [Laughs] I wasn't at any of these actions, so, you know, I only saw photographs or images of them later, because

our organization, Wetlands Action Network, was involved with litigation and trying to make sure that Playa Vista upheld the law, and we didn't feel we could be involved with any of those.

Hanscom

But there were other groups in our coalition that did. Jerry Rubin once did a sit-in on Playa Vista. It was on Gandhi's birthday, I believe. He ended up defending himself in court, you know, dressed as Gandhi, and tried to get a message across, and ended up doing some community service as a result. I don't think anyone stayed in jail more than a night, but some of them did.

Collings

He also did a hunger strike.

Hanscom

He did. Jerry did a hunger strike, I think before that; it was while DreamWorks was still involved. From the very first time Jerry Rubin and his Alliance for Survival got involved with our coalition, his whole thing was, "Well, we need to get a meeting with these guys." He was always about talking with the other side and trying to come to some reasoning with the other side.

Hanscom

I and many others said, "There's no way you're going to get a meeting with these guys. This is Hollywood. You know, it's just not possible, even if you're in the industry."

Hanscom

He said, "Well, we're going to," and he just kept on until finally he decided he needed to do a hunger strike to get that meeting, and we finally did get a meeting with Jeffrey Katzenberg. Although we were told we were not allowed to say that it was because of the hunger strike, that really is what made it happen.

Collings

What was the outcome of that meeting?

Hanscom

Well, it was a carefully orchestrated meeting. We were only allowed to have three representatives from our coalition. Bruce Robertson and Jerry Rubin and I went. And I was not allowed to represent the Sierra Club, they said. They wanted it to look like it was just a really little--

Collings

Just a meeting of local concerned people, yes.

Hanscom

Right. Although they ended up having about sixteen other people there from other environmental groups. NRDC was represented, Heal the Bay, the Friends of Ballona Wetlands, Audubon, Coalition for Clean Air, all groups that had not gotten involved with us, the League of Conservation Voters, and all groups that

to some degree had supported the Friends in the past. Ruth Lansford sat to Jeffrey Katzenberg's right.

Hanscom

It was really interesting, because we had been to the Universal Studio lot before to meet with someone on DreamWorks' staff to try and talk with them, through another supporter. So we had gone there before. But when this meeting happened, they were like--fear was taking over. They met us at the gate, and they were going to drive us in. "You're not allowed to drive here." It was like they thought we were going to do something terrible, you know, because Jerry had done this hunger strike. It was very strange.

Hanscom

But we got there, and everybody was waiting. They had already had their little pre-meeting, apparently. But we had met. Our whole coalition met the night before and really decided how we were going to deal with this. Based on how they were setting all these rules for our coming, we thought they were likely to try and marginalize us and all. So we decided we were going to have a press conference right afterwards outside, and so we did, and there were groups protesting, saying, you know, "Why weren't we allowed to be there?"

Hanscom

We supported that, saying, "Yes, Greenpeace shouldn't have been locked out, and CALPIRG and Sierra Club." It was not right that they chose all these people who were, you know, kind of supportive of their position. They were, I think, all groups who had gotten some kind of donations or support from them in the past.

Hanscom

But we had this really interesting, interesting meeting. Each of us got to say something, and the pitch we had was, "Why don't you, DreamWorks, just keep your studio on the area that was already paved, the Howard Hughes lot? We would be fine with that. And help us preserve the rest of it."

Hanscom

Katzenberg didn't have an answer for that. He said, "Next," you know. I mean, he just would not answer that.

Hanscom

We thought that was a good solution. But that was when we realized that they were really committed to not just having a movie studio, but to being developers. They were one-third developers in this project, and they were going to use the money they were going to make to help finance their studio. So in their minds, they couldn't get out, even though they were three of the wealthiest men in Hollywood. I mean, people say they got out because of money, but it's hard to believe that. So they could have, if they really wanted that. They just

thought that they had enough political clout from everything they've done that they could get what they wanted.

Hanscom

So, anyway, we ended up telling--there was an attempt at one point. One of the--I can't remember who it was; I think maybe the president of Heal the Bay at the time. Mark Gold wasn't there. One of them said, "Well, we think we would like to make an agreement that no one's going to speak about anything that happens at this meeting."

Hanscom

We said, "No, that's not going to happen. Sorry." I mean, for what? What purpose? It's not like we're, you know, making any progress. [Laughter] They had this great big fruit display, and you know, it was all very orchestrated to some outcome that they wanted. But we ended up getting our message out.

Hanscom

It was great, because the Hollywood trade publications did cover this, and they, at least the Hollywood Reporter and Daily Variety, were always really interested in what was going to happen with this whole deal. So that helped us.

Collings

So what do you think was the tipping point then, finally?

Hanscom

I think it was an avalanche of lots of things at once. There was an article in the Wall Street Journal about a year before they got out, where it was really clear that Rob Maguire, who was the president of Playa Vista at one time, and Jeffrey Katzenberg had a very big personality conflict. They both wanted to be in charge, and there was a lot of power struggle going on, I think. So that was underlying a lot of things. But we were actually very surprised when they pulled out, in many ways, because people told us, "David Geffen never backs off of something he wants," and it was really clear Steven Spielberg really wanted to do this.

Collings

Yes, and he had invited all the frogs in Los Angeles.

Hanscom

Right. [Laughs] He had invited all the frogs in Los Angeles to come to Playa Vista. They would have a home.

Hanscom

But I think that that was part of it. He got thousands and thousands of letters from schoolchildren, photos, drawings. We had a lot of outreach to the schools, I mean, just because people who got involved happened to be teachers and said, "What can I do?" So there was a lot of pressure there.

Hanscom

We went to all of their premieres, both Spielberg's himself, because he had his own films besides DreamWorks. We had protests at all of their big premieres. We were in their face wherever we could be. There were the films that Sheila and Bruce put out. There were people who thought they saw Steven Spielberg at the premiere of Sheila's film.

Collings

Really.

Hanscom

It was held at the Museum of Tolerance, which he has a very close relationship with. After the lights went down, there were people who thought he came in, slipped in and slipped out. He's known for doing that sort of thing with films he's involved with in premieres, so that's possible. Sheila actually ran into him maybe a month before they pulled out, and made sure he had a copy of the film.

Hanscom

There was a front-page article in the L.A. Weekly with a caricature of Spielberg on top of a bulldozer running over E.T. [Collings laughs.] It was titled "DreamJerks." So, I mean, there were a lot of things starting to come down on them at once that I think may have snowballed.

Hanscom

But I think ultimately there were things that we had information about that not everybody did, about the contamination on the site. I think DreamWorks didn't have that information. I don't think Playa Vista shared it all with them until they purchased the land, and it was in, I think, March or April of 1999 that they actually finally purchased their part of the land that they were going to build on. Then they did their own due diligence reports, and I think they saw the amount of contamination there.

Hanscom

The Hughes site was an aircraft site, where they dumped solvents and all kinds of things when there were no environmental laws. So there was a big toxic plume floating on top of the groundwater, floating into the soils. You know, these were not just any developers who usually would leave after they sell their places. DreamWorks was going to live there. They were going to have a daycare center on the site, and I think they really saw that they might have some liability themselves, and that maybe this wasn't where they were destined to be.

Hanscom

So, there was a Regional Water Board hearing that not too many people knew about that we went to, and their lawyer was arguing. This was after they'd purchased the land but before they got out. They were arguing with the state lawyer about, "But we were told by Playa Vista that we're not liable, that they are taking all liability."

Hanscom

The state lawyer was saying, "Well, that's not the law in California. If you own it, you're going to be liable, too."

Hanscom

So I think they, you know, just finally realized it was maybe not as good of an environmental site as they had been led to believe. I think that was a big part of it, because within a couple of months they were gone.

Collings

Yes, and you had a big party.

Hanscom

Yes, we did. We did. One of the--I can't remember if it was the Hollywood Reporter or Daily Variety; it was one of those reporters that called me, though, and said, "Did you hear?"

Hanscom

"Hear what?" I mean, I was always ready for some shoe to drop. But that was not something we had expected, so we were very, very relieved, because while a lot of people thought we were happy they were involved, that that was helping us get our names in the paper and things like that, having them involved was a real double-edged sword. Yes, it helped us get our message out, but it really was politically just impossible to gain any traction until they left.

Collings

Yes. I see that we're at eleven now.

Hanscom

Oh, okay. Yes, we are.

Collings

That's your time.

Hanscom

Yes, I've got to open the store.

Collings

All right. Okay.

Hanscom

But come back. [End of interview]

1.4. Session 4 (June 12, 2008)

Collings

Today is June 12th, 2008, Jane Collings interviewing Marcia Hanscom in her office.

Hanscom

And I'm going to make sure my cell phone is turned off, too.

Collings

Okay. So I just wanted to start out today with asking you about a few of the things that I noticed in reading some of the news coverage of the struggle. One of the things that really stood out to me was a characterization of Friends of the Ballona Wetlands as being more kind of mainstream, more "rational"--quote, unquote--and the coalition and Wetlands Action Network as being more of a --quote, unquote--"fringe element." Bruce Robertson, in his open letter to those interested in the Ballona Wetlands from his Ballona Valley Preservation League [Newsletter] quotes Ruth Lansford as saying--quote, unquote--"We realized that there was a real world out there," and that that's why they went ahead with this settlement, which you considered to be less than enough.

Collings

In another article Michael Montgomery, a DreamWorks executive, is characterized as calling, in particular, Citizens United to Save All of Ballona "a new voice that's thoroughly outside the mainstream." Would you say that there was this kind of cultural clash throughout?

Hanscom

I think that that was a perception that Playa Vista and its supporters wanted to create, and that's exactly why, when, for instance, we had the meeting with Jeffrey Katzenberg, why I was not allowed to represent the Sierra Club under their rules. The Sierra Club, which is considered a mainstream environmental organization in most people's books, was one of the original six groups in our coalition and had been opposed to Playa Vista for some time. The Surfrider Foundation was involved, also another large environmental group, national based. So I think that that was Playa Vista's intention, to try and create a perception of that, and in fact, there were times when they sent around letters and press statements suggesting that the Sierra Club was on their side, which was not the case. But that was a perception they wanted to create.

Hanscom

In terms of Ruth's statement about the real world, I think that when her settlement was finalized, that was their perception, that that was the most they could do. They had a governor that wasn't really interested in parks bonds. There were a couple of parks bond measures that had actually been defeated. So people didn't really see a clear path to a solution for doing more than what they had gotten.

Hanscom

Well, we refused to give in to that idea, and we thought that there was hope for something else. We weren't sure how; we just knew that there were other situations. Point Reyes National Seashore was one of our examples that gave us hope for something else, where they had actually come in and bulldozed the area, put in streetlights, put in model homes, put in roads, and now you would never know any of that was there, because [President] John [F.] Kennedy

signed it into being a national seashore, something that was not even a designation that had happened before.

Hanscom

So we knew things that could happen if enough citizens got together and had their voices heard. We felt that that was really what had been lacking here, that the Friends of Ballona Wetlands and Audubon had sort of negotiated their settlements in a vacuum without a lot of other groups around. Even the groups who Playa Vista had sort of sitting on the fence, like NRDC and Heal the Bay, who weren't positively advocating for them but also weren't opposing it, they didn't really know the details of the settlement, and once some of them found out, like Santa Monica Baykeeper, once we actually were able to show them the level of problems with this development, they then decided that they needed to oppose it as well.

Hanscom

So to us it was an education and organizing thing that really needed to be done so that the citizens of Los Angeles could have a say in really what was going to happen here, instead of just negotiating with a few individuals that, however well-intentioned, weren't able to get as much as what happens when you bring many people together.

Collings

So how do you think that the Bolsa Chica accomplishment played into what you were doing at--

Hanscom

Well, Bolsa Chica was a big part of it, because, just like Point Reyes National Seashore, Bolsa Chica had a similar development deal that the Amigos de Bolsa Chica had made. I came here, back to living in Los Angeles County after living in Orange County, I lived near the Bolsa Chica. So that was part of my frame of reference that I knew what we had been able to do there. The Bolsa Chica Land Trust and Sierra Club, Surfrider Foundation, and Huntington Beach Tomorrow, all came together and said, "We want to do something different, and we think this deal isn't good enough." They questioned that status quo, a deal that was made about the same time as the Friends made their deal here.

Hanscom

In Orange County, we didn't even have any real hope at all. I mean, all of our legislators there were not just supportive of the deal, but they were Republicans who weren't real interested in public land protection. But we found one thing that was a pressure point that the citizens could really speak to, and that was when Bill [William J.] Clinton got into office and he had Bruce Babbitt as his Interior Secretary. Literally thousands of people wrote letters and cards to both of them asking for help. The American Land Conservancy came in, and Harriet

[Burgess]--oh, I can't remember her last name, but she's a very good friend of Bruce Babbitt; she was the founder of American Land Conservancy.

Hanscom

She helped us to get his office engaged in the issue, and we were able to purchase a thousand acres of wetlands there that nobody thought could be protected unless it was tied to a deal to develop thousands of homes partly in the wetlands, partly on the mesa. Nobody was willing to give that up, so now the end result of Bolsa Chica is some 300 homes are being built on the Bolsa Chica mesa at the very back. It's still not good for the entire ecology of the area, but it's far better than what the Amigos had originally gotten.

Hanscom

So, yes, that was an example that actually helped to encourage the Ballona Wetlands Land Trust to get formed here. It encouraged a lot of people to see that there were other options. Port mitigation money helped fund that acquisition in Bolsa Chica, and also some money from the Exxon Valdez spill. Those were kind of unique solutions that people hadn't thought of before. "Well, how could oil spill fine money go to something like this?" And they connected it because the federal government connected it, because they said, "This is a Pacific flyway, and a lot of the birds that were impacted there come to Bolsa Chica," and the port had a need to pay for some of the destruction they had done.

Hanscom

So there were some unique things that were thought of, and that just told us all here there are new ways of looking at solutions. We just have to put the pressure on to the point where the elected officials want to find those solutions.

Collings

Right. Right, some creative thinking.

Hanscom

Yes.

Collings

Once the parkland was established, how does your organization now--and I know that Friends of the Ballona Wetlands also organizes tours and does things for visitors. Do the two groups sort of coordinate in any way, or are they entirely separate?

Hanscom

There's still a bit of tension there, for a couple of reasons. One, the Friends were sort of given carte blanche entryway into Ballona by Playa Vista for many years, so they felt like it was their land. In fact, if the state had not purchased the land through the scenario we worked on, Playa Vista's deal with them would not have made it public land. It was going to give them a conservation easement, and they would have been the decision makers as to who had access

to the land. We didn't think that was a fair thing. We thought the public in general needed to own the land, and we thought that a public resource agency needed to manage it so that the best interests of the ecosystem, not necessarily the best interests of Playa Vista and their supporters, would be really ruling things.

Hanscom

So things shifted a lot when the purchase happened, but the Friends also managed to get in the deal that they would continue to have their access with a monthly agreement that could be terminated with thirty days' notice. Well, after the purchase happened, somehow Playa Vista helped them get a longer deal, and they now have till the end of this year to sort of still feel like they're in charge of a certain part of the wetlands where they've been doing their restoration work for a long time. They have a trailer out there, a big container, actually, that's like an office building, that we don't think should be there, and Fish and Game Department doesn't think should be there. That's going to be moved at the end of this year, and things will be on a more equal footing.

Hanscom

However, when the purchase happened, we were all of a sudden allowed to request access, like any group would be, and if we met the requirements, which we have, we have a letter that says we can take tours on certain days and do certain activities there. The Sierra Club, Sierra Stewards, has a similar access. The Ballona Wetlands Land Trust has some access for their restoration work. So now there are a lot of different groups who have access, and the Fish and Game Department, who manages the Ecological Reserve, is kind of the referee to determine, making sure that people aren't there at the same time.

Hanscom

There have definitely been some conflicts, where because the Friends haven't liked sharing that, it seemed to us, we ended up in a big legal challenge where the city attorney, actually, tried to--which, this isn't city land, so it was odd that he took jurisdiction. But he went after my partner, Roy van de Hoek, for removing nonnative plants out there, which is what he was supposed to be doing. It took us getting a very high profile attorney, Tom [Thomas Arthur] Mesereau, to defend him before they dropped it and realized that this was part of this sort of underlying struggle that was still going on that Playa Vista was actually fueling, partly because Roy is a scientist who has testified on our behalf in litigation against Playa Vista in the past. There's still a lot of bad blood, shall we say.

Hanscom

However, I'm told things are turning the page. I think that after we went through that and after they saw that we weren't just going to back down and go run into a corner, I think that they decided maybe they do need to play fair.

Collings

Now, how would the city attorney even know that plants were being removed from a wilderness area? It just doesn't seem like the usual beat of the city attorney.

Hanscom

It doesn't. I think he thought he was doing something on the side of the environment by doing this, at least according to his press release. Maybe he thought he needed the press. He was running for attorney general at the time. Or maybe he had just been defeated for that and felt he needed press. But he put out a press release saying he was going after this scofflaw who was hurting the Ballona Wetlands. Everybody who knew Roy said, "What the heck is this? I mean, where is that coming from?"

Hanscom

Well, we have mutual acquaintances with people related to the Friends, and we got our hands on some e-mail traffic that was very interesting, that one of the people involved basically sent a message to a bunch of people, and they were mostly leaders of the Friends of Ballona Wetlands, saying, "Thank you for helping us get this guy. There's going to be an article in the paper tomorrow." And there was more, but it was clear that the Friends and Playa Vista, some of Playa Vista's people, were involved with it. Rocky Delgadillo has had a good, strong relationship with Playa Vista for a long time.

Collings

Now, you mentioned that one of the reasons that he was pursuing this had to do with his political career. Of course, you have this perspective because, as you've mentioned earlier, you have a background in public relations, so you understand how symbolic a lot of this public posturing can be. Are there other instances where you feel that your public relations background was really brought to bear in this struggle?

Hanscom

Well, I think that Bruce Robertson and I were deemed to be, by the coalition early on, that we were asked to be the spokespersons by the coalition and to deal with media. Bruce didn't have a background in that. He's a private detective in his real work. But he was willing to learn, and so we worked together on all of the press. There was a lot to do, especially when DreamWorks got involved, and I think that my background was vital to helping craft the messages we wanted to get out and helping activists, who don't really understand how to deal with journalists sometimes, how to really put our story forward, because we were up against this very, very well oiled and very well funded public relations machine, not only of Playa Vista, but of DreamWorks, too. Together, they knew how to deal with the news media and were experts on it every day.

Hanscom

I think that we did kind of go toe to toe with them at times, and were pretty amazed that we were able to do this. There are a lot of people who give up on the fact that we have a lot of corporations running the news media these days, and do we really have journalism intact is a big question. I would say that from my experience with this, given that we were up against such big odds, we were able to get our story across, because I think the journalists who are really doing the work do have a journalistic ethic that they feel very strongly about. Maybe sometimes they do get edited out, and I'm sure that that sort of thing happened.

Hanscom

In fact, once we had a very, very good investigative journalist, Mark Hertsgaard. He wrote the book *On Bended Knee* about the change in journalism during the [Ronald W.] Reagan administration. He's a very fine journalist who many people respect in the journalism field. He was asked by the New York Times Magazine to come out to do a story on this whole issue. He was put up here in Playa del Rey. They paid his expenses; had him here for a couple weeks, I think.

Hanscom

After he turned the story in, basically it got edited out because of Steven Spielberg's influence with the New York Times Magazine, is my understanding. Mark worked very hard to get this story to continue to be published, and it was, interestingly, published all over Europe in many other languages before it finally got published in English. It finally did get published in Mother Jones magazine, of all places. So he was committed to getting it published, but it wasn't nearly where it was supposed to be published originally.

Hanscom

So they did have a lot of influence with the media. However, especially with the television news, I think it was interesting that we were able, maybe because of the way television news has become entertainment these days, and they would like to see the colorful things that we kind of created, that we were able to get--

Collings

Yes, like the FrogWorks.

Hanscom

Like the frogs. The frog costumes, the turtle costumes, and then the Earth Water Air Los Angeles, EWALA. We had these giant, colorful puppets that walked through Los Angeles. Just walking in Los Angeles was a unique idea in itself, let alone with these colorful puppets that would stop traffic. So there were things like that that helped us. My understanding of the media, I think,

helped to figure out that we couldn't just put out a press release and hope somebody would listen to it.

Collings

Yes. Can you point to--perhaps you can't, but can you point to any time when maybe, you know, people within the coalition wanted to do a certain thing, but you understood, from a public relations standpoint, that you should do that thing differently or do a different thing?

Hanscom

Well, I think there were oftentimes when people thought, "Well, let's just send out a notice to the press and they'll all show up." We were often having to counsel everybody that, you know, they just don't show up. There's a million things going on in the city, and you have to have some kind of a hook, something that is going to be different. I mean, we were always looking for celebrities because of that. That was one of our challenges. So if we couldn't get celebrities; we weren't interested in doing violence; so the other thing is creativity, and that's what we really focused on was the creative.

Collings

Was there ever a time when you felt you had to kind of, you know, cool people down to not do something that you thought would not play well in the media?

Hanscom

Well, not that I can remember. I mean, we had such a diverse coalition, and some groups wanted to do things. The people who did civil disobedience were not things I had any control over at all. People just went and did those things on their own. So, you know, that was up to them how they were going to deal with press on those things.

Hanscom

A lot of people probably think we were more coordinated than we were as a coalition. I think that was really the strength of our coalition in many ways. We had a lot of diversity and a lot of diverse tactics going on at different times. While we did get together regularly to update each other and to coordinate some strategies, a lot of things were done that people just did on their own. So there was a hunger strike by someone else later on after Jerry Rubin did his, by someone I didn't know, and a lot of the groups got behind him and stood on the corner with him while he was doing that, and he got a lot of press.

Hanscom

So, like I said, it wasn't as coordinated as some would have liked to have made it, and I think that one of the reasons why Playa Vista would highlight me as a target sometimes is that that was easier to do. That's part of a strategy often that developers do, that they go in and, "Okay, let's find somebody to be the villain in this and make it look like it's just this person." Well, it wasn't just me by any

means. There were lots of people. I was definitely a leader in the effort and still am a leader in advocating for Ballona, but there are others.

Collings

Okay. Have you ever offered your public relations expertise to other environmental activist groups in the Southern California region?

Collings

Well, when people have asked here and there, I've given them advice here and there, but not on any regular basis. Other than through the Sierra Club, which I've been an activist in for a long time and even served on the national Sierra Club board of directors, so I offer my expertise in that organization from time to time.

Collings

Okay. I was just wondering, maybe groups like the Wilmington group [Coalition for a Safe Environment], for example, or anything like that.

Hanscom

Well, if they ask, I give them advice, but I haven't been doing that on a regular basis.

Collings

Okay. I was just wondering. So have you ever run into or heard of an obstacle as overwhelming as the DreamWorks obstacle in the environmental struggles you've been involved in or had firsthand experience?

Hanscom

Oh, I think there are lots of them all over the place. when I was on the Sierra Club board, I met activists around the country who were working on different things that were. I mean, like for instance--and this is one that was before I was on the Sierra Club board, someone who actually contacted me because of what we were up against with Spielberg--Paul Allen, one of the founders of Microsoft, who got a little bit involved on the fringes of Playa Vista for a while, we heard from activists who were working to try and prevent a massive development he wanted to do on an island up off of the state of Washington coast.

Hanscom

We heard from people--George Lucas, the story is that he and Steven Spielberg had a wager as to who would get their development done first, because Lucas apparently had something up in Northern California, where he also had a lot of folks up in arms at the scope of a project he was trying to develop. So, I mean, there are other powerful-influence people all over the country, and the world, for that matter, who are not doing things in alignment with the protection of the earth that I think--

Collings

Well, no, this just seems like a particularly thorny problem, because not only are they politically connected and powerful, but they also have enormous leverage over the media.

Hanscom

Right. Right. Well, I would say that I guess this was pretty big, in retrospect. [Laughter] I mean, we just had a goal in mind, so we didn't really put that out in front of us, I guess. But, yes. I mean, when people have power and money, though, it does matter. As a citizen group, you can feel very daunted, no matter what. I guess maybe that our success here is a story that could be encouraging to others to know; if you could do it here, you could do it other places.

Collings

Yes. Now, Ted Danson is regarded as being a prominent pro-ecological voice, but not in this struggle.

Hanscom

Right. [Laughs] I'm chuckling because I recall very well going up the elevators to DreamWorks Universal office at the time when Jerry Rubin, while he was on his hunger strike, and Jerry led a bunch of us up to their offices to do a sit-in one afternoon. The doors to the elevator parted, and there's a big photograph of Ted Danson and his wife, Mary Steenbergen, and I'm thinking, "Boy, that was interesting how they did that," because we watched how DreamWorks sort of gave them a sitcom, just like that, as soon as they got involved and knew that they kind of needed him and maybe didn't want to have his voice on the other side. All of a sudden they had a sitcom, and it was a sitcom that was allowed to stay on the air for a lot longer than usual sitcoms that are not doing well, and it was not doing well.

Collings

What was the name of that?

Hanscom

I think it was called Ink, I-n-k. It stayed on for a couple of years, and everybody said, "It's terrible. It's not getting ratings." But they just kept it going, and we thought, "Hmm, that's kind of interesting." I mean, you know, I don't know if there was anything implicit or explicit in it, but it seemed to us an interesting coincidence. At the time Ted ran American Oceans Campaign; it's now called something else. I can't remember what they've changed the name to. But at the time it was very prominent here in L.A. They mostly do things in [Washington] D.C. now. I don't think they even have an office here. If they do, they're not very involved in the rest--

Collings

But he was doing public service announcements at one point for ecological causes.

Hanscom

Yes, well, at that time they were putting out reports about how important estuaries and wetlands were. I was working with them in Washington on trying to strengthen the Clean Water Act. so it would have been a group that would have been a natural to be involved. We tried to get Ted to come out on a tour with us. Playa Vista prevented that; it was really clear.

Hanscom

You know, the only time we ever got any help from them was one of their staff people was sympathetic, and she was very conflicted and very concerned about why they couldn't get involved. She called one day when she heard that Playa Vista was having a ground-breaking. We said, "A ground-breaking for what?"

Hanscom

She said, "I don't know, but I think you'd better get out there."

Hanscom

So we went out to the site, and it turned out that Playa Vista was doing their--quote--"ground-breaking for the freshwater marsh," which was really a detention basin for the runoff from their project, and which was the subject of our litigation all the way to the [U.S.] Supreme Court, because they really destroyed a salt marsh to put it in. They had gotten bulldozers out there to do the first stuff, and it was in an area that they didn't even have a coastal permit for yet.

Hanscom

So there we were, and NBC just happened to have their film crew here that week for Tom Brokaw's piece, and so they captured them on film, which helped save a snake that was just getting ready to get chopped up by this machine. So we were able to get some media coverage for something we didn't know was happening, but they had the media covering their--quote--"ground-breaking" and making it look like it was wonderful. They had Ruth Lansford from the Friends there with Playa Vista and the city councilperson all moving the dirt. Great. It was very distressing.

Hanscom

But we were so out of the loop of what they were doing, and so we did get a little heads-up on that. That was as much as Ted Danson contributed. At some point he did do an opinion piece, saying how this was actually a good development for the wetlands. We never ended up able to actually talk with him in person about it. DreamWorks did a very good job of keeping him away from us.

Collings

While we're on the subject of people, is it worth looking at this chart, which was published in Variety, I believe, proposing--

Hanscom

Outside magazine.

Collings

--Outside magazine--proposing a sort of a cast of characters for a film on this subject?

Hanscom

Okay.

Collings

Okay. I mean, we've talked about some of those people, obviously, but others, I'm not sure why they come up, like Julia Dreyfuss.

Hanscom

Oh, well, I think what they were trying to say--I don't think Julia Dreyfuss was involved at all. It's just they were suggesting that that's who would be cast as me if we had a film.

Collings

I see. Okay, okay. All right.

Hanscom

Jeff Bridges would play Steven Spielberg.

Collings

I see. Okay.

Hanscom

Lloyd Bridges would play Rob Maguire. Interesting that he does look a little like him. Keanu Reeves would play David Geffen, and Jonathan Frakes from Star Trek would play Bruce Robertson. I don't know why they--you know, it was a cute way of them showing that, "Oh, this is not your normal environmental thing. We've actually got a film situation going on it."

Collings

Right. Yes, sort of an Erin Brockovich--

Hanscom

Right.

Collings

--kind of, in the making, yes.

Hanscom

I guess. And we don't even know why or who did that, you know. But the bottom line was the press we had gotten out there to date had helped people see, "Wow, this is somebody we thought was a good kind of public citizen, Steven Spielberg. What's he doing, doing this?" It caught a lot of people by surprise. In the beginning people said to us, "Oh, he wouldn't do that. He's a good guy," and a couple of years later, people are going, "Why is he doing this?" People really did get that maybe his image out there wasn't what reality was, and I think that may have played into their decision, ultimately.

Collings

And this was entirely an image that came from his role as a film producer and director.

Hanscom

Right.

Collings

He did not have an environmental record.

Hanscom

As far as we know. We couldn't find any evidence of him even, you know, giving money to environmental groups. He did give a lot of money to politicians, but we couldn't see that. Now, you know, someone might make a statement that because he gave to Democrats, that meant he was for the environment. But that didn't seem to always play out, as far as we could see.

Collings

Okay. I just wanted to ask you, in the film *The Last Stand*, there's a reference to a divestment campaign.

Hanscom

Oh, right.

Collings

Asking people to divest from their investments is a sort of different level of activity than the street theater and whatnot, so I'm wondering how successful that campaign was and how you got the word out.

Hanscom

Well, we actually sort of combined the two. One of our supporters actually paid for FrogWorks, the political street theater, to go to New York City, to Wall Street, to perform and to ask people there to consider cutting up their Discover credit cards and not supporting Morgan Stanley, which at the time--well, and still to this day--Morgan Stanley is who controls Playa Vista [and owns Discover]. They didn't [own it] when DreamWorks got involved, but Jeffrey Katzenberg at some point with his struggles with Rob Maguire saw that this was sort of a financial house of cards, and he ended up putting a new financing team together of Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, Oak Tree Capital, and Union Labor Life Insurance Company, and this conglomerate real estate investment trust is what is Playa Capital or Playa Vista today.

Hanscom

So when DreamWorks left the picture, we had to focus on who the real developers were after they left, because they were developers until they left, and then it was left in the hands of Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley being the real one that called the shots, and so that's who we went after. We decided to do a protest at the Morgan Stanley office in Malibu. We got quite a bit of press over that in local Malibu papers. Then we did a

small protest at the Santa Monica office of Morgan Stanley, and then it was suggested that we take this to Wall Street.

Hanscom

How many people took their money out of Morgan Stanley, I don't know. I do know some did, and some that had some significant money who supported our efforts told us that. We saw some people cut up their credit cards, and they'd do it on camera for us. So, you know, we made some kind of an impact, but is it a lot? Probably it was not the thing that tipped them over the edge, since they're such a large, large corporation, but I don't think they liked it, and that's probably why it was suggested to us that we go to Wall Street, because we were told by some inside people that that pressure was causing some concern there.

Collings

Some people inside Morgan Stanley?

Hanscom

Yes.

Collings

Okay. What are the things that you might say went wrong along the way?

Hanscom

What went wrong along the way? Well, first of all, you can never control volunteers, so activism is an interesting thing. It's not like where you have employees and you can say, "You're fired," or you've got to have a certain amount of accountability. So that was always a challenge, and because of the nature of volunteer work, a lot of people sometimes come to a cause with whatever psychological issues they might have, and so people are in it for different reasons. You know, they might be mad at their father, so they're going to take it out on Rob Maguire or Steven Spielberg. Or who knows? I mean, there are a lot of different reasons people come in.

Hanscom

So keeping everybody together working for a common cause is a challenge. We had a coalition that lasted probably longer than most coalitions do. Coalition work is very challenging because of that, because every group in a coalition has its own mission and its own leadership structure that makes decisions, and getting them all to agree on one--I think the thing we did the best was in the very beginning we had one statement, one sentence, that everybody agreed to, and that was what we kept focused on. Whenever we would stray from that, that's where we would get in trouble.

Collings

What was that one sentence?

Hanscom

It was, "Citizens United to Save All of Ballona is committed to protecting, restoring, and acquiring for the public all of the Ballona Wetlands ecosystem

and surrounding open space--surrounding undeveloped open space," period. That was really important to stick to that, because whenever we got onto other things, not everybody agreed. So the way we solved some of those tensions at times was we said, "Look, we're only going to come together for information sharing, not for decision making. We're not like a congress, where all the groups are going to vote or anything like that. We're just coming together to share what we're doing and to find ways where some groups can work together for certain things." So four or five groups might work on one thing; another six groups would work on something else; and sometimes we would all show up together at something.

Hanscom

But usually for public hearings and those sorts of things, we were all right there together, but for other things, the more creative efforts, I think we had different groups worked on different things, depending on the personalities that got along together. So that was a challenge at times, though, because everybody's personalities, you know, you don't necessarily choose who is going to show up and how to--you know, you either work with them or you just say, "Well, I don't want to work with that person." There was a lot of that, so keeping it together was a challenge.

Hanscom

What other things? I think the question is if we would have known it would have taken as long as it would have, would we have all signed up for it; I don't know. But I know people like Bruce, for instance, he didn't expect to be in it that long, and after the purchase happened, he really went back to his private detective work. Ballona Valley Preservation League still does some things with their film, but very little else. It was a long effort, and not everybody was signed up for the long haul.

Collings

Do you think that his background as a private detective was helpful?

Hanscom

Oh, it was very helpful, absolutely. He was able to document things for our lawyers in a way that most activists wouldn't have known how to do, I mean, because he's used to putting together exhibits for court things, and he knew when he took photographs that he'd have to have them in the context of what was there, not just close up. He just did an amazing amount of work of documenting things that the developers were doing illegally that was invaluable. His instincts, because of his work, I think, were really helpful.

Hanscom

And of course, the documentary film he did, no one was really taking much in the way of photos of what was out there at the time. Now we've got a number of people who are, but there really wasn't much in the way of documentation of

what was happening on the site in terms of the wildlife. He brought that all to life, and because he's used to just sitting still and watching for long periods of time, he'd just go out there for hours on his days off and get wildlife that no one even knew was out there. So that was also a really, really beneficial thing.

Collings

Yes. Can you think of anybody else who brought unique skills to the effort?

Hanscom

A couple of people; Roy van de Hoek, my partner, for one. When he got involved, we had already had our coalition going for several years. It started in 1995, and he came along in 1999. He had actually worked for the Friends of the Ballona Wetlands, and Bruce and some others had told me I ought to meet him. He seemed like a really good guy.

Hanscom

I said, "No, he's working for the Friends. I can't imagine he's somebody that's really going to work with us," because there was so much venom spit at us from that direction at times. But it turned out he actually left the Friends, in part because he would not remove a bumper sticker from his car that he had gotten that said, "Save All of Ballona." Ruth Lansford demanded he take it off, and he didn't; interesting story in itself.

Hanscom

But we met at the premiere for Sheila's [Sheila Laffey's] film, *The Last Stand*, and Roy, until Roy got involved with us, we really didn't have any ongoing scientific assistance. We had some scientists that helped us on declarations, some very prominent scientists. They weren't from this area, and so they would come and look at something and do their best analysis from observing on-site, and from some of the studying they've done. But Roy is the first one who really knew the landscape intimately and understood it.

Hanscom

To this day, he's really the Ballona naturalist who knows what's going on out there the most, and that changed really quite a bit the direction of our litigation. He was able to help us with our endangered species lawsuit, which, you know, we had--I sort of wonder how we did it with such little information about the real science of the place for so long. So he's definitely been a key to changing the focus to the wildlife, because we now know so much more about it with him here.

Hanscom

Then Susan Suntree, I would say, is also a key person who brought a unique perspective and gifts to us. She's the one who helped conceive of the idea of FrogWorks to begin with. She's a teacher at East L.A. College, an English teacher. She has a background in political street theater from Northern California. She said, "Hey, how come they don't do that here?"

Hanscom

"I don't know." I didn't even know what she was talking about.

Hanscom

She put together this group of actors and kept them going for years. She also helped. She and Jan Williamson, from 18th Street Arts Complex, really created the whole EWALA puppet conception, of having all of the colorful, creative, artistic expression has been something that Susan and Jan both brought to the effort, and Susan still holds that place.

Collings

What about legal expertise?

Hanscom

Well, legal expertise, we had to go out and find, and it was not easy, because most of the public interest lawyers in Los Angeles at the time either were conflicted out of this situation because they had represented somebody related to Ballona for years before, or either the Friends, or they had some kind of relationship like Jan Chatten Brown, who's a great public interest lawyer. Her husband worked on Playa Vista for the city attorney's office. There were all these different conflicts here.

Hanscom

Where there weren't conflicts, there were people who wouldn't touch it. It was just too politically challenging. So we had to find people elsewhere, and through other networks, we mostly ended up with lawyers that were in San Diego, interestingly, or San Francisco, in some cases. I coordinated most of the legal efforts for a long time. Now the Ballona Wetlands Land Trust and Surfrider are continuing with the legal challenge on Phase 2, but for most of the time I had to do that, and it was not easy. But we did bring in the Center for Biological Diversity at one point, and they are really, really great at legal issues relate to the Endangered Species Act. So it was nice to have that support from them.

Collings

So what's happening going forward?

Hanscom

What's happening going forward? Well, there are lots of things on the horizon. This year we're going to be doing a series celebrations related to Ballona, some public celebrations, a big family picnic, an arts event, and a gala dinner to honor the mayor, who, when he was assembly speaker, put the money aside to help acquire the land. We're going to be honoring a lot of the journalists who stuck their necks out. Mostly they were columnists and some investigative reporters who have interesting stories to tell, and who I think ought to be honored for really reporting on an interesting story but in a very pressurized situation.

Hanscom

We're going to be putting out a book called "Celebrate Ballona!" that a number of us are compiling, with photographs of flora and fauna. That will be given out at all of these events. There is no book on Ballona, amazingly. Even with all of the years of struggle over it, no one's ever written about what's really here. So this book is mostly going to be a coffee table type book that will help people fall in love with the place, we hope.

Collings

Yes, that's a great idea.

Hanscom

Yes, mostly images, but I'm also working on a book about the story of the struggle and the coalition activism, because I think there are so many stories that are instructive and interesting and you couldn't have made up in a million years, and how the activism relates to the wetlands themselves and what's here. I think that's what is important to tell.

Hanscom

Let's see. What else is up? Well, there's still a question over about a hundred acres of land that Playa Vista has, what's going to happen with that Phase 2 site. There's still a question about a number of other parcels of land that sort of surround Ballona, so we at Ballona Institute have formed a committee called Committee to Complete the Park. The idea is to try and acquire the other parcels of land as much as possible that are functioning currently as some support to the Ecological Reserve, and also to help bring State Parks in to cooperatively manage the land with Fish and Game.

Hanscom

We think State Parks needs to be here because of their commitment to the integrity of the resources, plus they have really great skills in interpretation. You know, the public needs to be able to love this land, but from a distance, and how we do that is a big question. So getting the right managers in here is really important. We have a great guy from Fish and Game now, but we think he could probably use some support from State Parks.

Hanscom

Working with the city on the lagoons that are part of the Ballona system, and the city Parks Department still needs a lot of education about how to manage an ecological area. So we're working on that. We have the Shallow Water Nature Store that is sort of an outreach, outpost, here, where people can come find out about things related to Ballona, and we're opening up an archive, library archive area that will have historical information about Ballona. People can come, either scientists or students or just the general public who might be interested. So there's a lot going on here.

Collings

So with regard to the Committee to Complete the Park, I take it that you don't see a need for any of the, you know, street theater and what have you to raise awareness at this--

Hanscom

Well, we haven't discounted that. Everybody's sort of been given a little rest, reprieve; but part of why we're doing these celebration events, besides wanting to honor all the many, many people that worked on this, and also to help raise awareness of the fact that there was an accomplishment. But we also want to let people know that the purchase didn't end everything; that there are more things to do. We know that there will be public hearings needed. Some of these empty parcels are at huge risk of being developed. We may need to bring FrogWorks out again to get involved. We may need other kinds of things. We're definitely going to need people coming together to protect the area.

Hanscom

One other big thing that's on the horizon that led to this is the--quote-- "restoration" that the State of California and the federal government are now talking about doing together, what they're going to do to restore the land. Well, that is a big problem right now, and it may be a huge, huge source of contention in the future, because what we have observed is that everywhere the Coastal Conservancy has come in to try and manage these coastal wetland restoration projects, there have been big problems, because they're not using biology and ecology to drive the process. Instead they're hiring engineers.

Hanscom

A lot of people don't know this, and so engineers, they come in and go, "Let's put a few bulldozers out there and move things around." We have some big concerns about that. Maybe because we fought for so long and so hard to keep the bulldozers out of Ballona, we don't want government agencies now to bring them back. Even though there may be things that need to be done to help heal the land, we want to see it done with citizen action, with communities coming together, going out there and removing nonnatives, shovels. Hand shovels are fine, but not big bulldozers that are going to really change and alter not only the soil structure and the water--that's usually their intention of doing that--but they're also disturbing an equilibrium that's happened for forty years now.

Hanscom

This land has been completely altered. It's not any longer a sinuous river or the Los Angeles River coming into this area. It's not any longer--I mean, we've got concrete sides on Ballona Creek. But there are thousands of birds that come and utilize that creek, even with the concrete channel, every year. There are some of the tidal channels that do still have that sinuosity that is really important to an ecological area. You can't create that with machines.

Hanscom

So the whole restoration planning of this is going to need a lot of people's attention. It's going to be maybe even more of a challenge than what we dealt with with DreamWorks, because most people--I don't know most people--a lot of people suspect that, "Oh, it's the government. They're not going to do something bad. The Coastal Conservancy, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Coastal Commission, if they are going to approve something, it must be good."

Hanscom

But restoration of wetlands is still a very new science, and we're very concerned, given what we've watched happen at Bolsa Chica and some other places, that it's not really being as--although Leopold put forward--he had a very famous statement about "It's kind of like when you take apart a watch. If you're going to tinker with something,"--he called it intelligent tinkering--"you must do it intelligently, and that means that you don't throw away any of the parts when you take it apart. You've got to make sure everything is still there."

Hanscom

And we don't even know what's out there yet. We haven't even done solid surveys to know what's out there. The Times just reported about an entomologist who was with the Natural History Museum, who just passed away. He had found over a hundred species of ants alone, native ants, a hundred different species. You know, if you come in and just scoop everything up and move it away, you lose that. So there's a lot to do.

Collings

Yes, it sounds like it. What other kinds of environmental issues have members of the coalition gone on to? I mean, you mentioned Bruce Robertson, for example, going back to his career. But have there been other issues?

Hanscom

Well, Sheila Laffey, who is the producer of The Last Stand, she got involved--she was only going to do a thirty-second public service spot for us, and she ended up following the story and being so engrossed by it that she worked on this for years with her film, and then several updates that she did. She just recently put out a film about the Los Angeles farm that had been--

Collings

The South Central Farm, yes.

Hanscom

The South Central Farm. So she's been working with them and put out a film on that particular activism.

Hanscom

CALPIRG has actually spun off a new organization called Environment California. CALPIRG was with us since almost the beginning, the California Public Interest Research Group. Environment California is now focusing specifically on environmental issues. CALPIRG still exists, but they've got this

other arm now that's really solidly on environment, and they've been working on solar roofs, getting solar roofs on everyone; a million solar roofs, I think, is their project.

Hanscom

Obviously groups like the Sierra Club and Surfrider all have their ongoing issues they've been--

Collings

But in terms of individuals who may have made a mark.

Hanscom

Yes. Well, Susan Sontree is working with us on this book that we're doing and on the events we're working on.

Hanscom

I think that this campaign took a lot of energy out of people, and so I think people really needed a rest.

Collings

Exhausted, yes.

Hanscom

Yes, and while the Ballona Wetlands Land Trust and Surfrider continued on Phase 2, it just hasn't had the oomph and energy behind it. It was a long, exhausting campaign, and now I think after four years of the land being in public ownership, I think people are kind of interested. We've had a lot of people stop by the store and say, "Well, what's happening? Is there anything for me to get involved in now?"

Hanscom

That's why we think it's time now for these events to happen and to kind of reinvigorate people and let them know that there are other things. I mean, all of those things I just mentioned can't be just paid attention to by two or three people. We really need to have an engaged, interested community.

Collings

Right. Now, how do you fundraise for something in order to do something like the gala?

Hanscom

Well, what we're doing is this book we're doing is going to--I'm wondering if I have a copy of the--well, I'll show you when we finish here.

Collings

Okay.

Hanscom

But the book is actually going to be a book that people can sponsor pages in, so a really beautiful image of a king snake or a gorgeous pink aster flower or what have you, at the bottom there will be a very tastefully done name of someone

who sponsored that page. We have a design firm called "Looking" in El Segundo, who is donating all of their services to make this a beautiful book.

Collings

Wonderful.

Hanscom

They've made it so that it doesn't look like it's advertising or sponsorship.

You'll barely notice it, but people who want to help support it can have some recognition in it.

Collings

Okay. Well, great. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to bring up?

Hanscom

I don't think so. I don't think so. Just that it does--you know, here in Los Angeles we have so much of a challenge at times to just deal with all the traffic and the people, and it seems like--yet, yet one of the main reasons people come here is because we have a really nice environment, the weather and the coastline, and I think that what we have attempted to do and what I hope will be the legacy of this campaign is that people are starting to see what's underneath all the concrete. People are starting to understand that we live in watersheds and that even on smoggy days you might not see the mountains, there really is a landscape here that is a beautiful, wonderful place and that needs to be treasured and respected.

Collings

Yes. Okay.

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