A TEI Project

Interview of Andrea Hricko

Contents

1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (May 20, 2009)

Collings
: Okay, Jane Collings interviewing Andrea Hricko in her office, May 20, 2009. Let's start at the very beginning and hear about where and when you were born.

Hricko
: Okay. Well, May 1945 in Torrington, Connecticut, small industrial town in northwestern Connecticut. I'm actually from a town five miles away from that, that's in a rural community called Harwinton, Connecticut, where I grew up and graduated from high school and then went to college in Connecticut, also, Connecticut College, which was then Connecticut College for Women in New London, Connecticut.

Collings
: Okay, so you were very sort of grounded in that geographical area.

Hricko
: Very, and to us it was quite a rural upbringing. My father worked in the factory in Torrington, which was five miles away. My mother stayed at home but had a huge garden, so she pretty much grew all of our food.

Collings
: Oh, really. How fascinating.

Hricko
: I was telling someone the other day that I actually realized when people are talking about this, "Eat things that are grown within fifty miles of your home," or ten miles of your home someone even said, that we actually did that when we were growing up, because my grandmother had a 400-acre dairy farm, and she also had chickens and pigs, and so all of our meat was from her farm, and then all of our vegetables and everything were from our garden, which, of

course, I had two sisters and I had to weed all the time. So we sort of ended up hating the garden and the vegetables, and as a result we had frozen or canned vegetables from that garden all winter and meat from my grandmother's farm. So we were pretty self-contained in terms of the family growing up, although I never looked at it that way at the time.

Collings

Yes, right. Did this garden come out of the notion of the Victory Garden or anything like that?

Hricko

No, it was because my mother had grown up on a farm and so she was very used to growing, they were very used to growing everything. I think also my mother's family was very poor, and so I think the idea of growing all your own food was very appealing. But she was very much into working the land, and I think that came from my grandmother's farm, which continued as a farm during all of our childhood until, oh, probably in 1980 or something the farm was sold. But so we spent a good chunk of our summers doing things at my grandmother's farm, with my mother and father helping on the farm. It was really a joint venture.

Collings

Yes. Was the farm sold for development, or was it to be continued as a farm?

Hricko

It actually was sold for development, but it was sold after my grandmother died and various unfortunate interactions between brothers and sisters in a large family, and so it got divided up and the farm was sold, and then eventually--and I've never been by there to see this, because I think it would be too frightening, it was sold for a large real-estate development. The farmhouse itself is still there, but the land all around it apparently has a lot of houses on it, so I don't really want to see that.

Collings

I see. Very interesting. Now, when you were growing up on this farm, was that sort of the norm for the area? Or was this considered to be pretty iconoclastic?

Hricko

Well, our house actually was like a two-acre house on a really pretty street in Harwinton, and so the fact that we had a big garden in the back was not unusual at all. Most people had gardens around us. My grandmother's farm was unusual. I mean, no one else that I knew had any relatives with farms. And something that was really strange at that time that I think has changed over time is that my mother often felt sort of almost embarrassed that she had grown up on this farm, like that they were poor and had grown up on a farm to her was not a good thing and so she felt sort of embarrassed by it.

Collings

But not at mealtime. [laughs]

Hricko

Not at mealtime, right.

Collings

What kind of factory did your dad work in?

Hricko

It was a--and I think it still is--his part of it was a needle factory, where they made surgical needles and other kinds of needles. He actually, I think, met my mother there, and I worked there a couple of summers also in another part of the factory where they made ball bearings. And it eventually got sold. It was the Torrington Company and it eventually got sold to Ingersoll Rand, I think. I'm not sure. I think it still exists, but I'm not positive.

Collings

Were your parents from the local area?

Hricko

Yes. My mother and father--my mother had grown up in Burlington, Connecticut, five miles from Harwinton, and five miles on the other side was Torrington. They were both from large families. My mother's family had come from Poland in the early part of the 1900s. My grandmother came over with two children, had, I think, six more. Her husband died very young, in the early twenties, so leaving my grandmother with a lot of kids and this big farm, although how they got that farm after they came from Poland we have no idea, bought it within a few years after they arrived.

Hricko

My father's family also was very large. His mother had been born in the United States, but they were a Slovak family, so my mother's family was Polish, my father's family was Slovak, and my mother and father could sort of speak to each other in those languages. Even though they're slightly different, they could manage to hide things from the three of us, my sisters and I. So my father's family had a similar circumstance where his father died very young, probably from the results of a coal mine accident he had had when he was younger in Pennsylvania, and the family had moved from Pennsylvania to Connecticut. So he was left with--being the second oldest in his family, he had to drop out of high school and help support all the rest of the kids in the family. My mother also did not graduate from high school.

Collings

Okay. Now, was your father involved in any labor activism at the factory?

Hricko

No. He was a manager, and I think there was actually some situation where there was a strike that one of my mother's cousins sort of accused my father of crossing the picket line, so I think that there was a little bit of the opposite of

the labor activism, although my understanding is that some of my uncles were members of the union and were quite active.

Hricko

Were they also working in local factories?

Collings

In the same factory, the same factory. And I actually sort of looked back at some of this and tried to figure out where--I mean, I worked eventually for a couple of labor unions, and I did a lot of labor-related work, and I'm not 100 percent positive where that kind of interest in activism came from, with my particular family background.

Collings

What about a religious upbringing?

Hricko

Our family was very Catholic, so we had catechism once a week and church on Sunday, but we didn't go to Catholic schools. Both of my sisters did go to Catholic colleges, but the fear of God was in us from going to so much catechism and church, for sure.

Collings

Yes. Well, I mean, sometimes the Catholic church talks about social-justice issues. Was that ever--

Hricko

I don't remember it being talked about much. What does sort of surprise me also, these towns are very--these towns in Connecticut may have changed now, but they're very white, and literally the first black person I saw was a woman who I sat behind my first day of high school who was African American. And yet that summer before, I gave the speech at our high school graduation (sic) and I spoke about civil rights, and I don't know--I mean, a lot of civil rights issues were happening at that time, but I'm not quite sure what prompted me to speak about civil rights at my high school graduation, either.

Collings

Did you watch TV at home?

Hricko

Some, yes, so that may have been it. That may have been what happened. That was '63.

Collings

Did you have any like high school teachers or social studies teachers who were talking about it maybe?

Hricko

No, not that I can recall, but I'm sure that must be perhaps what happened.

Collings

Yes. What were you interested in when you were at high school, in terms of classes and hobbies and things?

Hricko

I don't think we had any hobbies. [laughs]

Collings

Because you were always weeding.

Hricko

We were either always weeding or cleaning my grandmother's house, or helping with my grandmother's farm, or reading, or making clothes. I belonged to 4-H, and I had to learn how to sew, and I really hated it, and I was not very good at it at all.

Collings

I think I see where the civil rights piece is coming from. [laughter]

Hricko

But, I mean, we had to be--basically, we all had to be working all the time. We had to be productive all the time. There could be no down time in our family. We always had to be really struggling to be productive.

Collings

Right. And it was all girls?

Hricko

All girls. And I mean, that was mostly from my mother's side of the family, from my mother. My father was someone who really wanted--our parents both wanted the three of us girls to go to college. They hadn't graduated from high school, but it was absolutely an assumption that we would go to college, and were very demanding about our homework and very demanding about reading a lot. But my mother had this side to her where she would get very upset because my father was sitting down reading a book as opposed to mowing the lawn and the garden, so she was very much a taskmaster, which didn't make life very relaxing growing up.

Collings

So if you were actually doing homework that was fine, but to be reading was--

Hricko

To be just reading some novel would be not considered really productive.

Collings

What kinds of things were your friends at school thinking of doing with their future?

Hricko

I don't know. I mean, the first high school I went to--I went to two high schools. The first high school there were, I think, 400 kids in my class, and it was very demanding and quite academic. The second high school that I went to, where our town came up with a collaborative high school with the town next

door, there were a lot of kids who were going to be hairdressers and whatever, I mean, really were not aspiring to any kind of a career. Some of them, however, there were a couple of the boys in our class who went on to be like went to MIT or other schools and got engineering degrees.

Hricko

I felt very early on that I wanted to major in science, and I pursued that through all of high school with all kinds of physics courses and everything, and then in college majored in zoology. And in retrospect, I think it was wrong for me. I think that I was worried about taking courses that were very philosophical or freewheeling, where I couldn't really maybe understand something, and I was on full scholarship to college, as opposed to if I majored in biology, certainly I could memorize all of that, and I would get really good grades, and I would never lose that scholarship. So by junior year I had taken a number of--like an anthropology class which I loved, and a sociology of Mexico class that I loved, and even some economics classes that I liked, but I was too fearful to switch my major to something, and continued with the science. And so at some level, I think that my grounding in science but my interest in some of these other areas of sociology and anthropology, have sort of carried through with the way the rest of my life has occurred.

Collings

Right. Now, when you were in high school and you were taking physics and such, were there very many other girls in the class?

Hricko

No. I was mostly always competing, if you will, with young men in the class, sort of vying for good grades with these guys who later became MIT engineers, so not as much with women.

Collings

Did you feel comfortable doing that?

Hricko

Well, yes, I did. In the second school that we went to, it was so small that it felt pretty comfortable. But, yes, I did.

Collings

What were you planning to do as a profession, or hadn't you thought about it yet? Were you planning to have a profession?

Hricko

Somehow I was thinking that I would do some kind of scientific research.

Collings

Really.

Hricko

I actually applied for a laboratory job when I got out of college. I remember applying for some kind of a lab job at something called like maybe the Animal

Research Institute in New York City, and I went in for the interview and there was a monkey at the front counter, dressed up in a dress, that somebody was bringing in, and I decided this definitely was not the place for me. And very fortunately, I found a job in Boston with the U.S. Public Health Service, and it was really perfect, because here I was this sort of country girl who had never really been out of Connecticut, never been on an airplane, never been in an urban environment at all, and I ended up with a job that was kind of the precursor to the Consumer Products Safety Commission, in that it was a job at the Public Health Service, and we investigated home accidents. The idea behind it was to see if there were faulty products involved, or ways that a stove could be redesigned or something like that.

Hricko

So the job was to go into Mass[achusetts] General Hospital and go through all the emergency-room records and find, as one example, children who had gotten their clothes caught on fire from a stove or something, and then go out to the family and interview them about how that happened. Of course, there were some issues involving potential child abuse, but what it meant more for me personally was that it'd be one day when we'd be in this beautiful home out in Newton, and the next day I would be on my own knocking on a door in the projects in Roxbury. And this was before--this was 1967, '68, so it wasn't as dangerous at that time. But still, a twenty-two-year-old knocking on a door in an all-black project at that time certainly had some risks to it. But for me, what it meant was that I was seeing these huge ranges of types of living situations that people were in, from the very urban housing projects in Boston to very wealthy homes, and it was quite an eye opener in all accounts.

Hricko

What our job was, then, to try to figure out whether--take a sample of a fabric that had caught on fire, to take a picture of the stove and to write up a report about what we thought the problems were. And I'm embarrassed to say that for a period of time after that, I worked on trying to get flame-retardant fabrics, and now the flame retardants themselves have really inundated the environment as a bad thing, and people really think we shouldn't have any flame-retardant fabrics anymore. So what seemed like a good thing back in the late sixties turns out to really have been a chemical problem for the environment.

Hricko

But it was an absolutely wonderful job, and with a lot of very progressive people that I was working with. I felt somewhat like this public health, I felt like I had found a niche for myself, and also the fact that kids' pajamas--a lot of kids were somehow sort of catching on fire, getting really serious burns, ending up in the Shriners Burn Institute from clothing that was very flammable--

Collings

Right, and all this nylon and polyester was coming in at that time.

Hricko

Right. Made me feel that the industry really wasn't doing its job, and so it was the first position that I had where I really felt there was this dichotomy between the public and the industry, and the industry was not doing something it should do, which at that time seemed like having flame-retardant fabrics was a really good thing in young children's clothing, and that they would be so adamantly opposed to doing it made me sort of realize that there's this industry that's really bad and the consumer who's really being injured as a result, and I think that's kind of a thread that has been through a lot of my thinking also.

Collings

Right. And it sounds like you didn't even actually use a lot of consumer products when you were growing up, so--

Hricko

We didn't. Yes.

Collings

So you probably would have had the expectation--you probably maybe even idealized consumer products.

Hricko

Right, right. So anyway, that was a really great job, and I then decided to go into public health. So I certainly got to the public-health job because of the science, but the world of public health was a much better fit in putting together all of those other social ideas with the science.

Collings

Right. Absolutely. What kinds of things did your sisters go into?

Hricko

My older sister, two years older than I am, graduated from a Catholic college with a degree in Latin and went on and got a master's in classics, and was getting her Ph.D. in classics when she met her husband and got married and left her program, and she's done a variety of--right now she has her own company, sort of a home-based business. And my younger sister became a social worker.

Collings

So she had some of the same impulses that you had.

Hricko

Yes.

Collings

That's interesting.

Hricko

But much more direct care. I mean, she works in gerontology, so she's working for a lot of geriatric patients or people who have a lot of bereavement issues, so very much a one-on-one, whereas I've always worked on a public basis.

Collings

Right, right. And both of you performing very useful work I might say.

Hricko

Right. Yes.

Collings

So after you left Mass General where you were doing the surveys, what was the next step?

Hricko

The next step was that I went to graduate school. Then they had one-year master's programs, kind of amazing, and I did a one-year master's in public health at the University of North Carolina, so in that situation I was in a really new environment also and actually witnessing some of the discrimination against African Americans in North Carolina. It still was a time when even though it was illegal, if you opened up the yellow pages you could see hotels for colored people in North Carolina, which was a real shock, a real shock.

Collings

Yes, that would be a big switch from Connecticut, Boston, down to North Carolina, for sure, even today probably.

Hricko

Exactly. Even today. So that was a really great experience, and as part of it I had a choice of working at the National Safety Council for an internship in Chicago, or going to an Indian reservation in Oregon, and so I chose the Indian reservation.

Collings

Why did you choose that?

Hricko

It seemed like sort of jumping into a different culture would be really interesting, and I'd never been on the West Coast at all. So I chose this Indian reservation in eastern Oregon, which puts it on the eastern side of the Cascades. It was a hundred degrees every day. It never rained. It was an extraordinary experience. It was just absolutely wonderful. I was doing a little study of HUD homes, actually. I was really looking at the homes to see whether they were outfitted in a way that could help to prevent accidents of the elderly Indians, but I was also learning a lot about how HUD had built these homes without really consulting the community about the types of homes that they wanted. So they built them with these big, kind of like a ranch house, big picture window, and these are people who were used to living in teepees, and they didn't want big picture windows in their house. So all of the picture windows were covered up with these heavy drapes to try to have the sun not come into the house.

Collings

Well, in that kind of heat I can imagine.

Hricko

Yes. But it was really interesting to see the way a government agency had come in and kind of done what they thought was right without consulting with the public.

Collings

Right. Yes.

Hricko

And they screwed up. Also, the little house that I lived in was next door to the doctor on the Indian reservation, who would occasionally call me in the middle of the night to say that there was some accident and could I come help him in the clinic, which I learned very quickly I wouldn't, I think, want to be a doctor, because I would sort of pass out as he was trying to extract some grasses out of an injury that someone had had from a drunk-driving accident. But I also learned a lot about the alcoholism and other kinds of problems like that on some of the reservations, so that was also an eye opener in terms of social issues and social justice, really.

Hricko

Then somehow the mix of the consumer-product-safety work that I had done and the interest that there was in Ralph Nader at that time, somehow I just got it in my mind that--

Collings

Right, "Unsafe At Any Speed."

Hricko

--that I wanted to work for Ralph Nader, and so I just showed up on his--I guess I did send a letter ahead of time saying that I wanted to have an interview. And he said, "Well, I don't really have a job, and I don't really have something where you could--you might have to do some clerical work or something like this." And so I said, "Oh, I'll do anything. I just would like to get my foot in the door." So I got my foot in the door and stayed for five years working there, during a period of time when he started the Health Research Group with Dr. Sidney Wolfe, who was a very sort of activist physician interested in decisions that the Food and Drug Administration was making, decisions that other government agencies were making that ended up either hurting people or not protecting people. Anyway, I worked with Ralph for one year and then with Sid Wolfe as he set up this new group for the next four years.

Hricko

And during that time--so this was 1970--the Occupational Safety and Health law and the Mine Safety and Health laws were passed, so I was really on the forefront of working on these brand-new really important occupational-health legislation, and found myself with a cadre of young people who were

progressive and who really wanted to be working around these issues of labor unions and health and safety and social justice around worker issues. So that was really the time when the work that I was doing became much more political, if you will, than anything I had previously done, where we were petitioning to get new regulations for workers who were exposed to cancer-causing chemicals and sort of trying to see how this new law could really work to protect workers.

Hricko

And I met a man named Tony Mazaki, who was Mr. Health and Safety in the labor-union movement, a really charismatic individual who brought in a lot of young physicians to work on this, so there really was a movement of occupational health-and-safety activists in the seventies that was very exciting.

Collings

Yes, that sounds like you were in the right place at the right time. And what was Ralph Nader like, as you recall?

Hricko

Very demanding, very aloof, and you didn't see him very often. But as long as you were doing really good work, he was great. And the pay was nothing. But there was a great group of people working with him. A lot of the young lawyers who were Nader's Raiders were there at that time, so it really put me in a situation where I could observe some of the great work that these young, smart minds were doing, and then I was part of all that, so it was very exciting. I think that the boldest thing that I did when I was there is that we were looking at chemicals that caused cancer. This must have been like 1973 perhaps, and right around that time a New England Journal of Medicine article came out about a factory where--I don't think it even said what city the factory was in. But the main author of the New England Journal of Medicine article was from Philadelphia, a hospital in Philadelphia.

Hricko

So he said that there had been a cluster of cancer cases from this one factory and that the workers had died at unusually young ages, no smokers, and they had died from lung cancer, and that there was a chemical used in the factory called bischloro-methyl ether that the workers were exposed to in Building Six at the factory. So I think there were thirteen workers that had died. So it was quite a landmark incident in terms of those kinds of cases. There aren't too many situations like that. Vinyl chloride is one, where all of a sudden a number of workers at a vinyl chloride plant developed angiosarcoma of the liver. It's a rare kind of liver disease linked to vinyl chloride. But in this case, this article was in the paper, and so Sid Wolfe and Ralph thought it would be a good idea to investigate what that plant was and where it was.

Hricko

So there was a young intern that I worked with that summer, and we really investigated this whole situation, which meant that I spent days in the Philadelphia Library--you work in a library--so in the Philadelphia Library, going through old telephone books. I don't know if people save old telephone books anymore, but going through old telephone books and trying to find out--I got the name of one person somehow and then went through like who lived next to them, and called people. So I eventually got--I found most of the widows of the thirteen men who had died--

Collings

Ah, very good detective work.

Hricko

--and organized the widows for a press conference in Philadelphia, and it got front-page Philadelphia news coverage, demanding that these women had to be given some kind of compensation. One woman said the only thing she got was somebody from--it was the Rohm and Haas Chemical Company, and somebody from Roman Haas knocked on her door and said, "Don't worry, you're young. You'll remarry."

Collings

So there was no issue trying to get the women to speak out or organize--

Hricko

No, no.

Collings

--because there were no competing interests, it sounds like.

Hricko

Right. So that was kind of an amazing turning point, I think, in my life, and there were also then around this angiosarcoma of the liver, around the same time some OSHA hearings where the industry people came forward to testify about this, and the way the OSHA hearings were set up, I was able to sort of cross examine them. And that was another situation of an industry group that had known for a really long time that this vinyl chloride was a bad actor, but didn't make it public. So both of those incidents, the Rohm and Haas and the vinyl chloride incident, were real landmarks in my background in terms of the sense that I had of workers really needing organizations that could fight to protect them.

Collings

And actually going in and talking to people individually and organizing them seems like it was a big piece of that.

Hricko

Yes. And I've never done that quite that same way since, but it was really very important to me.

Collings

Just a brief question again about Ralph Nader. How could somebody so aloof attract so much talent to work with him?

Hricko

Well, it's funny. He's very aloof, and yet there's this like twinkle in his eye. I mean, there's this like sense of underneath it all this like fun part of him, even though he's very ascetic and very--but there would be times when you'd call him and he would answer the phone, "Joe's Bar and Grill." It was just, I don't know. There was something about him, and he's so smart, just so smart. But also what you learned from working for him is that you don't screw up. You don't ever make mistakes about something that you're working on. It's got to be really accurate. It's got to be really foolproof, and I think those are really good lessons to learn as a twenty-four-year-old or whatever.

Collings

Yes. So people felt like they were really moving ahead.

Hricko

And they were. I mean, there were reports on air pollution and water pollution that the kinds of reports that they did at that time, I don't think they've been replicated really. They were very important in terms of showing what agencies should be doing and what corporations were getting away with, so I think it was a really dynamic and exciting time.

Collings

Yes. So once you organized the widows and you had this sort of groundbreaking moment, what did that make you think you wanted to get into next?

Hricko

Well, it did interest me in sort of investigative work, and I didn't end up doing any of that really till quite later, which I can explain, because I was a journalist for a while. But I really do like digging into old documents and finding things. And part of what we did that was also very interesting at that time is that we did a survey, not for the Rohm and Haas case, but because we were doing the petition on cancer-causing chemicals for OSHA. So we sent a survey out to chemical companies all over the country saying, "Do you use any of these fourteen chemicals?" that we knew were the ones we wanted to petition OSHA to regulate as cancer-causing chemicals. "Do you use any of these chemicals, and if so, in what quantities? What do you tell the workers?"

Collings

Now, were they obliged to answer this survey?

Hricko

No, of course not. But dozens of them did, including Rohm and Haas, and Rohm and Haas even had an answer in there that they had first learned of something, that the BCME was a cancer-causing chemical on a date that was

earlier than we even knew, and they wrote in this silly little survey. So that was kind of fun also, and we used all that data in our petition to OSHA.

Collings

Do you think that was people inside the company who'd just been dying to say this?

Hricko

Could have been, it could have been. But it also was, I think, a time when people were not as attuned to--I think it'd be much harder for people to do a survey today.

Collings

Right. I would think that that would be privileged information or trademark or something.

Hricko

Exactly. They definitely would not respond. And then somehow, and I would have to really delve to try to figure out what prompted this, but somehow I got interested in women workers and the fact that there were a lot of women who were--there were two things happening. One, women were working in jobs that nobody was looking at in terms of the hazards. So women were starting to work with computers, and we didn't really know what was behind the screen. But also women were working as flight attendants and other kinds of positions that nobody was really investigating. But you also had women working in industry where they were exposed to certain kinds of chemicals, and we were getting some inkling that some of those chemicals could cause reproductive problems, but nobody was looking at that either, or even looking at the reproductive problems that there could be in men from working with those.

Hricko

So a young intern, who's now a physician, Melanie Brunt and I started putting together information about different chemicals that could affect reproduction and about women's jobs, and in the midst of all that I left working for the Health Research Group and moved to San Francisco, because of a boyfriend, and I started working there at a group called the Labor Occupational Health Program, but I continued working on this volume that we were coming up with. So we released a report that was a joint report between the group I was working at, Labor Occupational Health Program in Berkeley and the Health Research Group in Washington, called Working for Your Life: A Woman's Guide to Health Hazards on the Job. And people really responded to it.

Collings

What year was this, about?

Hricko

Maybe '76. And right around that same time there were stories that were coming out about women who worked around lead in lead smelters, who were

being told that they couldn't continue working there unless they were sterilized, because the companies were afraid that if they were exposed to the lead and then got pregnant, the babies would be born with neurologic deficits. So that became a really big issue that I was involved in. I should say when this Working for Your Life came out we had a press conference in Washington, D.C., and the labor unions, I mean the AFL-CIO was very leery of--we wanted to have our press conference at a conference that they were holding, and they were very afraid that this report was going to be too radical or something.

Collings

Or hooked into the women's movement in some way perhaps.

Hricko

Or something, in some way that they didn't want to be involved in, so that was kind of interesting also.

Collings

Yes, indeed, yes.

Hricko

And soon after that report came out, which I, of course, should have written into a book, but I'm always looking for the next big thing I have to be working on, we decided to do a documentary film on that same issue, and for that film we did raise a lot of money from labor unions and steel workers and other unions for it.

Collings

What was the difference between the film and the report in that respect, do you think?

Hricko

In terms of the unions?

Collings

Yes.

Hricko

I'm not sure. I think that we were going to focus on some of the lead industries in the movie, and the steel workers, for example, have a lot of women working in the lead industry, and they were really interested in how those women should be protected. We focused on a smelter in Idaho where they represented the workers, so I think there was that kind of interest.

Collings

A tie-in there.

Hricko

So we did an hour documentary film about women workers and these different kinds of issues on the job. Then there was a lot of interest around that time in California in the issue, what we called the cathode-ray tubes at that time, of women working in front of computers and what that might do to their health.

So this whole women workers and women's health as a combined issue was something that I spent a lot of time on.

Collings

Right. And at that time I think there would be a lot of interest in women's health. I mean, this was the women's movement and--

Hricko

Exactly. And I actually got asked to fly to Sweden to give a talk to the Social Democratic Women at a conference in Sweden about this report, which was very exciting to do also.

Collings

There was sort of a large women's conference held in Sweden like around 1980 or something. That wasn't the same?

Hricko

It wasn't the same one, no. And then let's see. Okay, so I know. In 1979 OSHA had issued a new workplace standard on lead, and partly because of its interest in women and also just that lead was a very important issue--it was kind of the landmark case study of trying to take one of the worst, most ubiquitous chemicals that workers were exposed to that could really injure them, and regulate it in a really good way from OSHA, and at that time Eula Bingham was head of OSHA. She was a very progressive person. This was the Carter administration. There was really a sense of getting things done in Washington.

Hricko

And so I sponsored a conference. I have sponsored a number of big conferences in my life, and this was a conference on lead poisoning and workers. It was in San Francisco. We had maybe 250 people, a lot of union support for it, and I invited John Froines, who had written the OSHA lead standard, to the conference to speak as our keynote speaker. And then he eventually became my husband.

Collings

Not at the conference, I presume.

Hricko

Not at the conference, but the conference was in February of 1979, and we got married in November.

Collings

Gee, that was speedy.

Hricko

And we lived in two different cities, and there was no e-mail in those days, so it was kind of tricky. So that was, yes, a pretty rapid romance. But then that meant that John was in Washington, D.C., and I was in San Francisco, so I moved to Washington. Then I would say I guess that when Reagan was elected, John looked for a different job to get out of government and took a teaching job

at UCLA, so I kind of went back and forth a couple of times there from Washington to San Francisco to Washington to L.A., and we've been in L.A. ever since.

Collings

Okay. Where did you learn these phenomenal organizing skills? I mean, was that something that came out of your background?

Hricko

Well, I've never been an organizer, and even now I actually kind of feel like I've got good community organizing skills, but it's not what I'm supposed to be doing on my job, so I have to rein myself in sometimes to not do that. It is part of my job if I'm organizing a big conference and trying to get a lot of people to come to it, and I've done really well with that with some of the port conferences that we've had recently. But I don't know, I don't know where some of that comes from.

Collings

Okay. Well, this is sort of jumping ahead quite a bit, and we'll sort of backfill as we go along, but why don't you explain how you got into the port pollution work, the goods movement?

Hricko

I do think there's something in there that I really need to fill in, though, just because it's a big chunk of time and it pretty much was--when I moved back to L.A., all of a sudden I didn't have a place I was working. There wasn't an obvious job for me to be taking, and I kept giving a friend of mine ideas about news stories, environmental stories that he might do. So eventually he hired me to work at the CBS TV station in Los Angeles, and I worked my way up in a year or two to being a producer, where I did a lot of environmental stories and also a lot of investigative work. And so I felt like some of my interest in investigative work from the Rohm and Haas telephone book experience, I had an actual chance to use in that television world. So I worked there for ten years, and then I went to Washington, which is a very funny jump from the television news business.

Hricko

But I went to Washington during the Clinton administration, and I worked for three years as the number-two person in the Mine Safety and Health Administration, so I was actually inside one of these agencies that was working on worker health and safety issues. And again, in the mining industry there is a real--the workers with these mining companies that are really trying, many of them trying very hard to skirt the rules around mine safety, so that was actually a really interesting experience. And when I came back from there, the day I left that job I took a job as director of community outreach education here at USC for the air pollution project that I work on that has led to all of this port work.

Collings

Right, right. Now, when you were working on the investigative environmental stories, what kinds of stories did you find would be most accepted by the network?

Hricko

That really changed over time. It was great at the beginning when I was working there in the, like, mid-eighties. We actually did a nine-part series on toxic waste in southern California, and a lot of investigative work. I mean, finding these toxic waste sites that residents didn't know about. We would knock on the doors and tell people, "Did you know that that's a toxic waste site across the street from you?" I interviewed Penny Newman for one of our stories. That's how I met Penny way back then. But then local TV news really changed, and by the time I left it was a not very pleasant place to be working, with sort of daily stories or I literally once got asked to hang out on the floor of the hospital at UCLA to see if I could--I think it was when Rock Hudson had AIDS, I mean, something like that. But I really couldn't tolerate it towards the end.

Hricko

I did have one interesting stint of working with a reporter who was called "the troubleshooter," and there people would write in about scams that were happening, people whose homes were being taken away by signing a contract for a new rug or something, that actually involved investigations, so that was actually sort of fun. But by the end of that television news experience it was pretty horrible.

Collings

So are you saying that when you first started there, there was more of an appetite for these kinds of stories like toxic waste and--

Hricko

Oh, much more of an appetite, much more of an appetite. I mean, we had some of our producers who went to Cuba and people who went to Nicaragua and did really interesting stories, and by the end, I mean, there were so many more crime stories and quick-and-dirty things that you could have on the air. I mean, the quality of the intelligence of the reporting really was decreasing.

Collings

Right. And this was the local CBS station?

Hricko

Local.

Collings

Who were some of the people that you worked with that you thought were doing a good job in that area?

Hricko

Well, one young person who was there was Sylvia Lopez, who's currently an anchor at one of the stations. There were some--Warren Olney. I did a twelve-part series with Warren on the politics of AIDS, and he, of course, maintains an extraordinary career. Patty Ecker was a great reporter who was there, who did a story every week about a young child who needed to be adopted, and she had this very high adoption rate for the kids that she did stories on. There were some people who went on to be NBC news reporters, etc. Lester Holt was there, who now is an anchor for national news. Ann Currie was there. She was a great reporter, and she deserves to be in high places where she is at the Today show, so some really good people, and some people who weren't so good.

Collings

Yes. Was there ever a time when you received any kind of directive that the focus of the story should change? Or was it just something, a drift that happened over time?

Hricko

It seems like it was a drift. You would submit ideas for sweeps series, which is the times that you got to do the special series, and they wouldn't be very excited in it, and there would be times when things would change, where they would want you to do some writing in the newsroom instead of being a special-segment reporter, which was pretty horrible to try to do. I was terrible at doing daily news, news writing. And we had a strike in the middle of it, a Writers Guild strike that was pretty horrible also.

Collings

Yes. Now, did you get a sense of audience reaction to the pieces as you were going along?

Hricko

Not as much as you would these days. I'm very jealous when I--we would do a series and we would hope that people would have an easy way to contact you, but they didn't. And even at some level these days, when you almost have a situation where some reporters can put up a little thing and you get information before you even do your big story--I think the information flow is so different now. But I must say that I find it really sad what's happened with local television news, but also what's happening with the newspapers everywhere. I just feel that the ability to do any kind of in-depth reporting has diminished, and I'll talk about that a little bit with regard to the ports also, because I think that's really important.

Collings

Yes, okay, all right. So would you like to start a little bit talking about the ports' work?

Hricko

Sure. So I started here at USC the end of 1997. This is a great team of scientists under Dr. John Peters, who are doing air pollution work, and we have a center funded by the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences, and my job is to be the outreach person for that. Then we started another center, Children's Environmental Center, that I also direct outreach for, so there are two different cores of outreach.

Collings

Outreach to the community?

Hricko

Outreach to the community. And we would have annual meetings of maybe the twenty centers that are funded by NIEHS around the country, annual meetings of the centers, but also separate meetings for the outreach cores, and it became very clear that some of the outreach cores were most comfortable doing work, when you're talking about the public, doing work with K-to-twelve schools, like developing curriculum or working with teachers. And at some level if you think about it, that's a very safe thing to do, important but really safe. You're not going to get in a lot of political trouble if you're working on environmental issues with school teachers.

Hricko

And then some of us have gotten more engaged in some of the issues around environmental health that end up being more political, or where you have to really watch what you're doing so that you don't overstep your bounds, if you will, because you work in a university. And that's a little bit been the trick, I think, that it is not as easy to be working on air-pollution issues with the community and not be calling out the fact that the ships that come in are heavily polluting, or the diesel trucks are, or the ports aren't doing anything to clean up their pollution.

Hricko

But I should step back to say that as part of my general outreach work, in 2001 we held a town meeting that was on environmental-health issues, so we had people speaking about successes. Someone was talking about getting a lawsuit that they'd filed against a landlord to get the lead paint removed from a home. There were a couple of other topics that were not air-pollution topics. It was a general environmental-health conference. And we had been advised that it was really good to have open mics, where people could just come up to the microphone from the audience and tell us what their concerns were. So we had scientists talking about their science, and we had open-mic situations where people could talk about their concerns, and people kept getting up there and saying, "We're really concerned about the Port of Los Angeles, why the ship emissions are completely unregulated, and the growth of the ports has been dramatic."

Collings

Now, were these sort of opinion leaders from communities, or were these just--

Hricko

They were just some residents. We didn't know who they were. They were some residents that we didn't really know. Jesse Marquez was one of them. So Jesse stood up at a microphone and said, "You have no idea what it's like living down near this pollution." So Warren Olney was our moderator, and he basically didn't believe that ship emissions were not regulated. I didn't believe it. John Peters, our scientist, didn't believe it. None of us had really heard this before, but people kept getting up and saying that. And Penny Newman, who we did know, said, "The warehouses out in Riverside are happening because of the increase in imports into the ports," and people were getting up and talking about the diesel trucks in their neighborhood and that trucks were parking overnight.

Hricko

So Warren decided--Warren did a news piece not too long after that on his "Which Way L.A." show about the ports, and we decided that we really needed to be looking at this. If this was as big an issue as the community told us it was, we really should be looking at it. And it turns out that everything they said was correct and that, in fact, our scientists had been doing research on following children over time, starting in the early nineties, following thousands of children in L.A. to see what happens to their lungs when they live in different communities and with differing types of air pollution. And so we knew, of course, that cars are a problem, that trucks are a problem, but we had not had any focus at all on what it meant to have this huge port complex, the largest in the United States, right in our backyard.

Hricko

So it really grabbed all of us by surprise, and it's not that we were completely lax in not looking at it. If you look at the statistics, between the mid-nineties and the mid--let's see. Between 1995 and 2005, the growth of the port was astronomical. So it wasn't so much that we hadn't noticed it. It's just that the port was madly growing in size.

Collings

Yes, as the imports from Asia were building.

Hricko

Yes, that's what I meant. The imports were just dramatically up, and so everything that was connected to that was up. So I was kind of given the okay, the go ahead by our scientists to really plunge into this and to try to make sure that the science that our scientists were doing was part of this decision making that was happening at the ports. So I started going to a lot of port hearings and presenting our science, and at those same hearings Jesse would be talking about

concerns, and then Angelo [Logan] started his group, and Penny Newman was involved out in Riverside. But there got to be more of a cadre of people. And also in 2001, 2002, the NRDC sued the Port of Los Angeles over not having done the right kind of environmental review for a big terminal called China Shipping, so that got really big news.

Hricko

And all of a sudden the ports were on people's radar screen. And I would originally go to some of our center retreats and I would talk about the ports, and people were like, "Where's she getting this from?" Like, "We've never heard this." And then pretty soon things are in the paper, so it really became a very big issue that we were very involved in, right, again, being in the right place at the right time.

Collings

Right, right.

Hricko

And then it became clear that it wasn't just having to present at the port hearings, but that there were rail terminals, rail facilities being expanded, and freeways were being expanded, and that you needed to be at all these different hearings. This is where I think the role of the press was particularly important, and why I think it's really tragic what's happening now that you don't have the same kind of ability. I actually was taking a group of students, I was teaching an introductory public health class to Occidental College students, and I wanted to take them down to the port. So this was late 2001. And I went online to find out how many trucks there were on the 710 Freeway, so that when we went down I had something to tell them about the 710. Well, I kept seeing these notices that the 710 Freeway was being slated for expansion, that they were thinking about double-decking the 710 Freeway. Now, this is the part in the sixties of the port, not the part in Pasadena.

Hricko

And I talked to some of the community groups about it, and they said, "I don't think you could be right. We haven't heard anything about that." And some of them didn't think it was a very good organizing thing to get involved in, whether the 710 Freeway was expanding. Too long--it probably was going to take ten years to worry about that. But we held a small environmental-justice institute with the Liberty Hill Foundation to let people in on what was happening about the 710, and in the midst of that Deborah Schoch, a reporter from the L.A. Times, was assigned the Long Beach beat. Several of us got in touch with her. Actually, I was not the first person. Somebody from a community group told Deborah she should go to this community meeting that was going to be--no, it wasn't a community meeting. It was a technical advisory committee meeting that was going to be talking about the 710 Freeway, and

Deborah went to that meeting and she was astounded. She lived in Long Beach and she's a reporter. She had no idea that this was happening, and here was this big meeting. And so she did a story about the 710, that it was going to expand, it was going to take 600 houses, that air pollution was not much of a consideration, and it was big news.

Collings

Well, it was supposed to be faster freight.

Hricko

Right. It was big news, and the Long Beach Press Telegram also did a huge front-page story. So all of a sudden it was no longer just a port issue, but it was a port issue and now it's a 710 Freeway issue, and the 710 is linked to all the ports, the imports rising. And Deborah Schoch just really got into this issue with great intricacy, and she followed this as a beat like for about two years. And I did this once, and I don't know where my little analysis is, but there had been like a couple of stories a year about the ports, and all of a sudden there were like forty stories in 2002 and in 2003. And then Deborah like dropped off that beat, and the stories just dropped down. There are a couple of people that sort of tried to pick it up after her, and there have been, especially the truck program--

Collings

The Clean Trucks Program.

Hricko

--a significant number of stories, the Clean Trucks Program. But during this really critical point in time of the end of 2001 to the end of 2003, at a critical time Deborah Schoch's reporting made all of this an ongoing saga that people were reading in the L.A. Times, so that people knew that there were lots of problems happening in lots of different areas, and they knew about it from her reporting. So those of us who were testifying at these different hearings and presenting the science, she was picking up on that, and she was reporting on the latest scientific studies that came out and how they related to the ports, so it was a really critical period of time, and I actually think that I worked with her a lot on background to try to make sure that she had a lot of the scientific information, and I think that my earlier work as a journalist was helpful with that.

Collings

Yes, because you could help craft the information.

Hricko

Yes. But I think that her drive to do that was really critical.

Collings

And why did she go off the beat, do you know?

Hricko

I think you'd have to ask her, but I think it just got really frustrating doing really important stories and not having them placed in the most prominent positions, and probably having some of the stories she came up with maybe being told they weren't interested, and then just trying to broaden her beat some, but she played a really pivotal role in that. So I mentioned Noel Park to you earlier. One of the things Noel Park said to me is that in the late nineties these homeowner groups were just hitting their heads against a wall with going to the harbor commissioners, talking about the air-pollution problems, and that--

Collings

Was this in Long Beach or in L.A.?

Hricko

L.A. And that they felt that it wasn't until 2001, 2002 that we had this big town meeting, NRDC sued China Shipping, we started bringing the science around to all these different hearings that were happening, and so all of a sudden you had the homeowners, who had always been complaining, but now they had the lawyers, who were suing, and people from the scientific community, who were saying, like, "This is real. It's not just the community groups saying that they're getting asthma. They really are getting respiratory problems from this air pollution, and the air pollution, the contribution of the air pollution from the ports is huge in terms of the L.A. Basin. Maybe 25 percent of the particulate matter is coming from those two ports." But you didn't just have someone from the community saying, "This is killing our kids," and someone rolling their eyes at them, but you had the legal people and the scientific community backing them up, and that's what really made a difference in the ports coming around.

Collings

Right. And how did the community groups, which tended to be sort of like low-income people of color, and the homeowners' associations work together, if at all?

Hricko

I think pretty well. I don't have any really inside information on that, but I think quite well.

Collings

They would mainly come together at a hearing?

Hricko

Right, at a hearing.

Collings

Just kind of like people's turn to get up at the podium and make some kind of statement.

Hricko

Right. There always has been, though, there has been a lot of friction between Wilmington and San Pedro, because there was a sense that Wilmington is much poorer than San Pedro and that the political elected officials give more stuff, if you will, to San Pedro, and so that's been an ongoing issue for decades in that area.

Collings

Yes. I mean, would you attribute all of this activity to the fact that the Port of L.A. did finally agree to participate in the Clean Trucks Program in the way that they did?

Hricko

Well, there was something before that that was really important, and that is that, well, first of all, the Ports of L.A. and Long Beach had not ever worked together on anything until they came together--well, I need to go back even one step further. Before Mayor [Antonio] Villaraigosa was elected, Mayor Hahn had been really hammered on what he was going to do about the Port of L.A. and the pollution, and so he came up with a program called the No Net Increase Plan, and there was a task force that met over and over and over and over again, with a lot of important people and community people and scientists on it, environmental activists, etc. Then there was an election and Villaraigosa won the election, and Villaraigosa didn't really want to call his plan the No Net Increase Plan, because that had been James Hahn's name, but they decided to start crafting a Clean Air Action Plan, and the decision then was made to do that with the Port of Long Beach. So that was the first time the two ports had ever come together on something, and that was a really critical step for the two ports to come together and for them to adopt this program, and a lot of us were supportive of it in terms of the real need to protect health and clean up the air.

Hricko

There's a lot of concern since that time about how much is really happening under that Clean Air Action Plan. I think the Clean Trucks Program is phenomenal if it ever is allowed to really do what it was meant to do. So I think that Villaraigosa's election was really important in terms of the Clean Air Action Plan, but also putting on some new harbor commissioners that he really made understand that this wasn't a joke, this was real. I'm fearful that the Port of Long Beach has a lot more window dressing about what it's doing than is real. They're spending millions of dollars a year on public relations to promote themselves as a green port, and I think that it's a little unclear to me whether they're taking all the steps they could be taking to actually clean up the port.

Collings

Yes. I mean, just with regard to the Clean Trucks Program, there's like a clear difference between the L.A. and the Long Beach approach to it, from what I understand.

Hricko

Right. And part of the reason why I feel this about Long Beach is not just theoretical. I really read the Middle Harbor expansion project very carefully and felt that the traffic figures were not accurate, that they were going to be handling 26 percent of their imports of the containers on dock, but the port's been handling 26 percent of their containers on dock forever, and that that still left a huge number of containers from a very large port, 3.3 million containers in the one terminal alone that were going to have to go to a near-dock rail yard that was going to be driving trucks through the local community, and it's a really bad idea to have a rail terminal five miles away from the port and have to truck everything there. And I'm absolutely 100 percent positive--I spent days looking at the Middle Harbor figures--that their traffic figures are not accurate, and that their analysis of what they're doing with on-dock rail is not accurate, and their comments to me basically just said, "These are our numbers."

Hricko

They did actually say that--at public hearings they have said, "We don't have any more room to have more on-dock rail," which is what everyone prefers. "We don't have any more room for it." But in the comments to me they basically said it was a political decision. And so I think that that little harbor project has been promoted as the greenest terminal in the world, and I don't think it is. I think that there's a lot more they could have done with that terminal to make it really green, and that's a huge operation that's going to be happening, that they've never really listened to the health problems that I think may occur as a result of not fully mitigating the impacts.

Collings

Right, right. And your role actually is community outreach, so in terms of going about and getting out, how do you go about that?

Hricko

Part of it is going to all these different hearings and making presentations, and part of it is working with community-based groups to try to teach their members about the science. And so, for example, we have a Goods Movement 101 presentation that we've done with one of the community groups--

Collings

Which one?

Hricko

East Yards [Communities for Environmental Justice], and within that we teach people what particles are, what the different sizes of particles are, how the particles get into your body, you know, why are we concerned about diesel exhaust? It's not just that diesel is dirty. I mean, there are particular things that we're really concerned about, and we actually give them scientific articles that they can read.

Collings

And are the presentations in English and Spanish?

Hricko

Yes.

Collings

And the articles as well?

Hricko

The articles actually aren't. That's interesting. But we give them the abstracts really of the scientific articles and have people then meet in groups and have to report back on what those articles say, so that they would feel more comfortable if they were saying, "USC has done studies that show that if children live close to freeways, they're more likely to have asthma." They've actually seen that study, and they're more comfortable with saying that. They kind of own that information. We've also developed what we call neighborhood assessment teams, where we've trained groups of mostly women, mostly Latinas, mothers of children with asthma, and we've trained them in Wilmington, Long Beach, and out in Riverside, and now there's a team, I think, in San Bernardino also. What we have is a protocol so that you can choose a particular place in your community where there are a lot of trucks, and there's a protocol for how you count the trucks as a percentage of the overall volume of traffic so that you can report that.

Hricko

And the A-Team we call them, neighborhood assessment teams from Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma was able to report to David Freeman, President of the Harbor Commissioners, "There are 550 trucks an hour that are going by Hudson School," and that, "We can't have any more trucks," they say, "going by that school on the way to the rail yard, because this is what we already have." So that was a surprise actually to him, because nobody else had counted that data, and Caltrans didn't have it either. And then we have ultrafine-particle counters, so once they've had the training in understanding what particles are, they learn how to use these ultrafine-particle counters that counts the number of particles, and they can be out there taking shifts, so out there during maybe an hour and then plotting what the particles look like during that time, and they can then try to compare them to different parts of the community.

Hricko

So that's been a very powerful tool, and some of the women who have been through that neighborhood assessment team program say that they're very empowered to do more in their community, and they feel much more confident about the science that they're working on.

Collings

Yes, that's wonderful.

Hricko

We've also done some policy briefs, and now we are doing--also, our conferences are a big way that we've gotten information out. So as an example, we had a conference in 2005 with 400 people, and a conference in 2007 with 550 people, and these two conferences--

Collings

And this was the "Moving Forward," is that--

Hricko

Right. These have been really just on ports and goods-movement issues, so ports, goods movement, trucks, freeways, and at the last conference in 2007, at Moving Forward, we had people from sixteen states and five countries in addition to California. So we had a lot of people from around the state, but we also had people from Kansas, where a huge intermodal rail facility is being considered, and, frankly, it's trains that come from L.A. that go to the Midwest. So they're carrying these products that are destined for the Midwest, and the rail line would go right through Olathe, Kansas, and near there the gentleman who came to our conference was talking about the fact that his farmhouse was going to be surrounded by acres and acres of warehouses. So he was as interested in the warehouse and rail issues as Angelo Logan is in Commerce, and as Penny Newman is Riverside, but he lives in Kansas. So people felt they could really share information and learn different strategies, and again, learn about the science and have an opportunity to tell scientists about their concerns in South Carolina or Kansas or the Windsor, Ontario border into Canada. And that was a very powerful two-day conference, to learn a lot from people.

Hricko

We are working on developing a Google Earth map where you could click on your port or another port in the United States and find out information about that port, but also who's working on those issues in that community. So it's been quite exciting.

Collings

Yes, absolutely. Now, when you have the outreach to the community, the A-Teams and what have you, is there ever any discussion of what is coming through the ports and the value of those goods? Or is that a subject that's basically left untouched?

Hricko

The value in terms of the economic engine?

Collings

No, the value in terms of the necessity of--

Hricko

Well, a lot of people feel like our work is very tied in with "The Story of Stuff." I don't know if you've seen that incredible--

Collings

I'm familiar with it, yes.

Hricko

--incredible animated video. And some people think that there should be more of an emphasis on the sort of anti-consumerism emphasis in terms of the work that we're doing. And I think actually what we're seeing in the United States, of course, right now with the economy being low--

Collings

De facto.

Hricko

--de facto, we're seeing less consumerism. I think we're seeing less consumerism, and if we looked at the air-pollution monitoring, which the port hasn't been as good as they could be at analyzing it to show us the trend, but I think that we would see that the air-pollution levels near the ports have also dropped.

Collings

Now, imports are down, as I understand it.

Hricko

Imports are down dramatically. So people are buying less. People aren't working, very sadly. People are buying less, which means the imports are down, which also means the jobs are down at the port, and the subsidiary jobs connected to the port are down. But I think that we will see a difference in terms of the air pollution as a result of that.

Collings

But in terms of what you're talking about with community groups or even at the conference, the issue of what's coming through the port is not really part of it.

Hricko

Well, there's an incredible guy named Dr. John Miller, who coined the friend "diesel death zone" for the area around the port, and I put in a tape from our 2005 conference the other day to listen to, and I happened to catch the part where he was speaking. And he said, "What we have to understand is that they may call the port the engine of our economy, but we cannot shop our way to greatness." Which I thought is kind of incredible. Our economy is--I mean, the future of L.A., I mean, we have this beautiful climate and these incredible people, and that's what our future is. Our future is not shopping our way to greatness. But we're really focused on, especially our group here is focused on the role of ports and goods movement as a system that's bringing diesel pollution into our communities, but really close to our communities, rail yards that are across a fence from neighborhood homes, and freeways that are right

next door to where people live and schools are, and our science is showing that that's a health problem. So that's really the focus.

Collings

So the focus is on cleaner air, cleaner freight.

Hricko

Right, for cleaner health. I think that what happens, though, then is that--what I find happening is that if I just went to the port and said, "We've got all these studies that show air pollution is causing harm to people," they literally say, "We know. We accept--." James Hankla, who's the president of the Long Beach Harbor Commissioners until next month said, "Andrea, we know. We've heard you. We've heard the community groups. We know air pollution from our ports is killing people. We understand that. But we're working on it, we're working on that."

Collings

Is this part of the greenwashing?

Hricko

Well, but they do accept it. I mean, they do accept it. But I think that what it also means then is that it's important--it may seem really tedious to be going through these environmental reports, reading all the traffic data, but the devil's in the details really in terms of whether or not the ports are really going to clean up, and it really depends on whether their traffic data is right about the number of ships that are going to come in, and the number of trains that are going to be going through Riverside, or the number of trucks that are going to be on the 710 Freeway. So I have found that it's not sufficient to just say, "The data shows that air pollution is harmful. Our scientific studies show that." But we have to be able to look at the way they're analyzing what they're doing at the port, to see whether it's actually going to reduce air pollution.

Hricko

I listened to the whole Middle Harbor hearing the other day, and a woman said, "Oh, we're only going to have this many trains, three trains more a day, and we're only going to have fifty-two more trucks a day on the 710 Freeway." Well, the numbers don't add up. I mean, there are some containers that aren't going anywhere with their traffic numbers. And, of course, since most of us are not traffic engineers, it's really easy to, I think, come up with some misleading assumptions when the traffic data is wrong. So some of us have been really trying to focus on better understanding what the assumptions are for traffic.

Collings

Right.

1.2. Session 2 (June 1, 2009)

Collings

All right. Jane Collings interviewing Andrea Hricko, June 1, 2009, in her office. I did find your book "Working For Your Life."

Hricko

Oh, you did? Oh, that's really funny. In the library?

Collings

Yes.

Hricko

Oh, that's great. Well, that's really great.

Collings

Right. And I was just wondering--

Hricko

1976, wow.

Collings

Yes, yes, the whole study right there.

Hricko

Well, you know what's interesting about this is that it feels to me like almost every job that I've had, even though they've all been really different, I mean, ranging from a television station to working at a government agency in Washington, now being in academia, they all are involved in taking scientific information and really trying to have people understand it better and so that it can be used in policy, but that workers and residents can really understand it and be more empowered themselves to be able to use that science in changing public policy.

Collings

Right. Well, that's exactly what I was going to ask you. I was just going to say, like how did you publicize these findings? Because like you have stuff in here about how the chemicals that hairdressers work with are hazardous, and they wouldn't belong to a union particularly, so a union might be able to get that information out. I mean, how would you get this information out to the people that you're talking about in this study?

Hricko

Well, back in the seventies there was a big movement of young, progressive college students and doctors and public-health people working on occupational health and safety, so that this report, actually, "Working for Your Life" on women workers was quite popular when it came out, and a lot of people used that information. But it hasn't been--now, this is 2009. It's only been in the last few years that people have really started looking at hairstyling salons, but more looking at the--and I didn't talk about manicurists back then, because I don't know if it was such an industry. But now you have primarily Vietnamese women working in nail salons, certainly in southern California. They may be

different nationalities elsewhere. And there are people who are looking at those issues kind of as an environmental-justice issue, because one particular population is working on that issue.

Hricko

I know that when my husband first came to UCLA in 1981, he did a study of some of the chemicals that were in manicurists' nail salons, and people really laughed at him at the time for doing this research on manicurists. That was 1981, and there haven't been very many other studies until very recently, looking at it. So we tried to get it out through, even though they aren't unionized, but through unions and through some of the popular press, newspaper articles, some of the same techniques we have to try to use now.

Collings

Right. Right. And this is sort of off the topic, but what got your husband into that area?

Hricko

I think it might have been either a phone call to them or just driving around L.A., which was, of course, different than Washington, D.C., and seeing these nail salons everywhere. It's better now, but back then as soon as you walked in they were using methyl methacrylate, which was very toxic, and you could really smell it when you walked in, so I think that there have been some changes. But it was a pretty interesting study.

Collings

Yes. Well, I mean, what is your experience, your daily experience like? I mean, do you walk around smelling certain chemicals, I mean, in a way that the rest of us don't?

Hricko

Probably, probably. Certainly I was driving down to a nursery the other day down the 405 Freeway, and when you get to the area in Torrance, you could really smell--this was Saturday--some of the refineries, and I think that you do become more attuned to some of those toxics, because that's kind of what you're working on a lot. And I seem to be particularly sensitive to diesel, and I do a lot of work on trying to reduce diesel emissions. And one day I was sitting in this office here at USC and could smell diesel exhaust and called the Health and Safety Office, and they said, "Well, yes. It's Friday afternoon. On Friday afternoons we test the diesel generator, and the diesel generator is right near the intake valve for the air-conditioning system in your building." And I said, "Well, you know it's a cancer-causing chemical." He said, [lowers voice] "No, it's not, it's absolutely not." And I said, "Well, no, we actually do research on that." And he said, "No. You're just wrong. It's not on the list." And it was. But I'm pretty sure they've moved it, because we don't have a Friday afternoon diesel smell in the building anymore. But so I guess I am pretty sensitive.

Collings

Yes. Okay. I guess I also wanted to ask you about when you said, and you had sort of actually even led into this, that part of what you have been doing all your life is explaining the science of this to lay people. Is that a challenge in any way?

Hricko

It is as the science gets more sophisticated. It's no longer able just to say, "Air pollution causes health effects," or, "Air pollution is linked to asthma." People want to know, what's the mechanism of that, and exactly what happens in your cells if you breath ultrafine particles? My husband does research on that and so he really bristles if someone says, "You breathe ultrafine particles and they settle in the deep parts of your lungs," and wants it to be much more elaborate in terms of explaining that. So it's much harder, because people know more about the mechanisms and the physiology, but it's also harder because there are a lot of genetic issues now involved, and so people are interested in the gene-environment interactions and whether your genetic makeup makes you more susceptible. And some of our research is showing that, and that's, I think, particularly difficult to explain to people.

Hricko

We actually have a young woman who is a postdoc who's looking at genetics and environment, and I'm going to be working with her some on our outreach program, so that we can develop some good messaging for community residents about the genetic issues that are involved.

Collings

I mean, did you ever have instances where, like in this sort of article that we just briefly discussed off tape, where the community didn't want to hear it, have you ever run into that kind of thing, where the community just really doesn't want to hear about it, they don't want their lives disrupted by this information?

Hricko

Well, actually, in southern California it really seems the opposite. In fact, I would have to argue that at our first big town meeting that we did on environmental health back in 2001 it was the community that was coming to us and saying, "We think we're sick, and we want somebody to be studying this." And they had been telling the ports and the railyards for quite some time that they thought they were sick. So it's actually the opposite, where we have what I would call a very research-interested community of residents in southern California.

Collings

It seems like a real activist community around the port.

Hricko

There really is. Around the ports, but also these other areas that our Impact Project [THE: Trade, Health, Environment Impact Project] covers. Our Impact Project is an academic-community collaborative, so we have USC School of Medicine, and we have Occidental College, which has an Urban Environmental Policy Institute, and then four community-based groups that are really along that geographic reach of where the ports have off-port impact. So the products come into the ports and there are tremendous air-pollution impacts around the Ports of L.A. and Long Beach. But then the containers get moved up the 710 Freeway, and you have eighteen communities along the 710 Freeway, or they get moved to a local railyard before they head east, and you have residents living right around the railyard, or they end up in Riverside near a big warehouse. So our Impact Project really takes those four geographic areas, the ports, up the 710 Freeway, out to Riverside and San Bernardino, and looks at the impacts along the way.

Hricko

What I would say is that there are those community-based organizations that really are craving working with the scientific community and really want to understand the science better. Some people refer to those as research-literate communities, where they're really seeking scientific information that helps them understand what's happening, but also to bolster their arguments that their communities need to be cleaned up.

Collings

Yes. Well, in talking with both Jesse Marquez and Penny Newman, I really got the impression that they had done a lot of groundwork to help people connect the dots and realize that illnesses and health problems were being caused by the pollution, that this was not just something that people came to by themselves, but that these organizers within the community had helped people understand that--

Hricko

Absolutely.

Collings

--and so they were sort of ready for you.

Hricko

Very much, very much so. And I think that back in 2001 when people started talking about the ports, no one was really thinking about the problems of the 710 Freeway in Commerce, or the problems out in Riverside and San Bernardino with the warehouses. Penny was, and we actually--some of the communities in Riverside are part of our USC Children's Health Study, so we had worked with Penny in terms of community education in her area for a long time. But in terms of connecting the dots and really having people understand this is not just a port issue, and you can't solve these problems by just cleaning

up the ports, that is a very important step that the community groups were very much involved in pointing out.

Hricko

And it's still a very important issue, because the ports, of course, are not willing to accept the responsibility for the fact that all of these containers are coming into the ports and then heading through our communities on our trucks and train tracks and causing problems all along the way. So it's a quite complicated and perhaps even legal issue that a lot of people would rather not have to worry about. And there really are health impacts that occur in all of those different locations. In fact, some of them--there's a railyard in San Bernardino and a railyard in Commerce and a railyard in West Long Beach that have--they're three of the--well, actually, the top cancer risks at railyards in California are all in southern California, and interestingly enough, they're all railyards that the community groups have been arguing for years are serious problems that need to be cleaned up.

Hricko

And so the California Air Resources Board then did a study, and it turned out that those communities actually do have more emissions from the locomotives and the other kind of yard equipment used at the railyards. So it sort of validates, I think, the communities' concerns and that communities are able to recognize when the impacts are just too much for that particular community to bear.

Collings

Right. And you had said that you really enjoyed the movie, the animated thing, "The Story of Stuff," because it outlines in such wonderful terms how all of this pollution is produced and why. Is that film something that might be shown at any kind of community event, or do these community-organizing events focus purely on health effects, and they don't go sort of beyond into any other kind of political education?

Hricko

Most of the community events have been about the science and the health impacts, and if the community group is having the event themselves they'll be talking about community organizing and how to get something done in their community. There are a few groups I know that have shown "The Story of Stuff," because many people feel that what "The Story of Stuff" does is to show the sort of folly of the consumerism in our country, and that we can't really solve some of these goods-movement problems as long as people keep wanting to buy the least-expensive products and finding those products inexpensively made in Asia and then importing them, so that the true cost of that product is--

Collings

Of the 4.99 transistor radio.

Hricko

Yes, or the 9.99 doll is not being reflected in what it takes to get that doll from China across the ocean, through the ports, onto the trains to Chicago to a Wal-Mart. And someone is paying those costs, and even the mayor of Long Beach [Bob Foster] has said, "Kids in Long Beach should not have asthma so that a child in Kansas can have a cheaper pair of sneakers." But in reality, that's what's happening. So part of the question with the recession, I think, that is interesting about Annie Leonard's "Story of Stuff" is whether with the economy being so bad, are people actually realizing that they don't need all of this? There was even an article in the paper yesterday that the auto companies are worried about whether people may realize they don't really need a new car every year.

Collings

I saw it.

Hricko

So, but people may be really reevaluating a lot of things, and maybe if the economy gets better, maybe some of that will hold. Maybe the downturn at the ports will last a longer time than the ports are predicting. But meanwhile, what we're faced with in southern California is a sense from the two ports that the downturn is going to change, that imports are still going to be two or three times higher in the coming years, and so they're rapidly moving forward on getting approval on a lot of marine terminals, new freeway projects, to accommodate more and more growth at the ports. I evaluate those environmental-impact reports really carefully and make sure that scientific studies that we believe the ports should be considering when they're making such decisions are part of the record of the proceeding, and that the right kinds of methods are used.

Hricko

It's actually quite frustrating, because in two of the recent projects, the Middle Harbor project at the Port of Long Beach and the project called the SR 47 truck expressway that's sponsored by Caltrans and the Alameda Corridor Authority, it really seems like the authorities are playing loose with the facts about traffic data. They argue that the new expressway is going to take trucks off the 710 Freeway, but then when you say there are going to be all these trucks on the new expressway right next to people's homes they say, "Well, no. A lot of those trucks that you think are going to come from the Port of Long Beach, they're actually going to go up the 710 Freeway." "But you said earlier that they were going to take trucks off the 710 Freeway." "Well, of course we're going to have more trucks on the 710. There are just going to be less trucks than there might have been if we didn't build this freeway." So it's very frustrating that the traffic data--for this interview I won't go so far as saying it feels like people are lying with the data, but there are a lot of discrepancies that always are in the favor of

saying that whatever the new road is, it's really going to have regional benefits, and it's not going to impact the people that it's a hundred feet away from. And from all of our studies we know that having trucks, thousands of trucks and cars on an expressway within a hundred feet of homes and 600 feet of an elementary school is not a wise land-use decision in 2009 to be making.

Hricko

So it's very frustrating, because there's no mandate to consider the most current science when you are making decisions on building these roads, and a lot of it feels like business as usual, and that there's a bit of a lip service to the science as they're making decisions about expansions.

Collings

Greenwashing.

Hricko

Greenwashing.

Collings

What about the statistics that the community groups gather? Because you mentioned last time that when the A[ssessment] Team had put together information about truck traffic, and this was information that even Caltrans had not gathered, and that this information made a big impact. Are there any instances where you've been able to challenge some of these numbers that you find specious?

Hricko

Well, even on this SR 47 Project that's--I'm mentioning it a lot, because the environmental impact report, the final one, just came out last Friday. So it's hundreds of pages long and attempting to respond to the different issues that all of us have raised. For that the Neighborhood Assessment Team, the A-Team from Wilmington, part of our Impact Project, they went out and they measured how far houses were, and they actually did calculations of how many people lived within a certain number of feet of the roadway that was going to be built, and it was very good, very good data. And yet the conclusion is that there are only eight homes that are considered close enough to be at risk. The methods of doing the scientific analyses I think are faulty that ACTA did, the Alameda Corridor group did, and they didn't really consider Jesse Marquez's group in Wilmington and the results that they had.

Hricko

So they did a health-risk assessment, which people were demanding, but then they claimed that there wasn't going to be enough traffic on the new freeway to really have an impact, and that's where the traffic data and the veracity of the traffic data really comes into account. I mean, if you have inaccurate traffic data--if you say you're going to take the trucks off the local roads and put them on this freeway, then you're going to have a lot of trucks on the freeway, and

then you're going to have a lot of people next to that freeway impacted. But so they say they're going to take them off, but that there still are going to be a lot of trucks on those arterial streets through local neighborhoods, so you won't really have quite as many trucks as one might expect on the freeway, so then the risk is lower. It's all the way you play with the numbers.

Collings

Yes. And aren't they suggesting that it won't be backed up, so they won't be idling?

Hricko

It won't be backed up, right. That's a question, too, because as we know with freeways, usually within three or four years they get backed up again. And that's a claim that's often made, and it will be made, I'm sure, on the 710 Freeway, that the congestion relief really reduces the air pollution, and I imagine it really does for the first few years, until everybody realizes what a great route the 710 Freeway will be and starts--there are more trucks on it, because that's what it's designed to have is more trucks, and then more residents start using it, because if it's open they'll start using it. And in a few years, as was the case with the 210 Freeway and every other expansion we've had in Los Angeles--we keep expanding the 405, and what happens? But these arguments are very hard to combat. I mean, your average person in L.A. when asked, "What should we do?", more and more people are saying, "Why can't we put light rail down the middle of the freeway?" But your gut response often is, "We need to widen the freeways."

Hricko

So Caltrans likes that, and the elected officials like that, and it's a lot of money for contractors and construction firms, and there are jobs in building it. But in the long term, continuing to build and expand these freeways in Los Angeles is something that is really adding to our health problems. That's one of the things that our scientists here at UCLA, at USC here and also at UCLA, are really experts at. We have one of the best groups in the United States or maybe even the world looking at proximity to freeways and what kinds of pollutants are there immediately adjacent to the freeway, if you have houses or schools or playgrounds or parks there, and what kind of health effects are there within those first 500 feet or 1500 feet of the freeway. And the Planning Commission, L.A., is now interested in whether or not they should keep siting schools and charter schools in those areas, and housing developments, is that a bad idea? So it's becoming much more of an issue in a lot of urban-planning decisions.

Collings

Do you have a sense of whether the economic downturn is going to make port mitigation and port growth, freeway growth an easier struggle, or will it be

more challenging, because you don't want to stand in the way of any kind of economic boost?

Hricko

Well, the Middle Harbor Project at the Port of Long Beach was just approved, and I haven't seen these, but apparently on the back of buses there are signs that say, "We approved the Middle Harbor Project. It will mean x many thousand new jobs. Who would you like to thank first?" And I do think that that particular project had a lot more it should have done to reduce the health impacts. It's a huge expansion of the terminal and with a million more containers that will be coming in. I think that there is a bit of--there's a lot of public relations greenwashing going on, and so I do worry that the jobs will sort of supersede what's real about the mitigation measures.

Collings

Right, right, even though there's more information now about the actual health costs of these--the social health costs to society.

Hricko

Right.

Collings

Was that Mayor [Bob] Foster that made the comment about a child in Kansas shouldn't--

Hricko

It was Mayor Foster.

Collings

Because I've never heard anything like that. Nobody's reported anything like that to me before.

Hricko

Yes. It was pretty interesting. And yet, when the Middle Harbor Project was voted by the harbor commissioners in Long Beach, he's not a harbor commissioner, but he was very much in favor of the Middle Harbor Project, even though--and this is pretty technical. But about 40 percent of the goods that come into L.A. and Long Beach doesn't stay anywhere in California. Forty percent of it goes east of the Rockies. So you've got to get those goods onto a train somehow. So with 40 percent of it coming in, the Port of Long Beach is having on-dock rail, where you take the container from the ship and you pretty quickly at the port get it onto a train. Twenty-six percent of the cargo is going to get onto a train at the port. That leaves 14 percent of a huge number of containers still having to be trucked to a railyard that's in a local community. So, in fact, even though Mayor Foster said that, he's been in favor of a project that is going to mean more impacts in West Long Beach for sneakers that somebody's going to buy in Kansas. It's still happening.

Collings

Well, so maybe this is an example of how the language is co-opted, perhaps, by what we might call the other side?

Hricko

Right. Well, in fact, if you look at the budget for the Port of Long Beach, the budget for this year has more money in it for public relations and promotion of the port than it does for the environmental management of the port--

Collings

Oh, well, there you go. That's it.

Hricko

--which is, I think, a pretty astounding statistic. And--yes.

Collings

Yes. That says it all, doesn't it? [laughter]

Hricko

It does to me.

Collings

Yes. Well, just sort of with some of the follow-ups, and maybe this is not what you would like to talk about at the moment, but you had been in the Clinton administration, and just what were your general impressions of that administration, from your vantage point in the Mine Safety Administration? I mean, did you get a feel for how things were run? Do you have any war stories, colorful war stories?

Hricko

No, no colorful war stories. But I think there were a lot of gains made during the Clinton administration that were certainly, of course, then lost over the next years. But we were actually able in the Mine Safety and Health Administration to move forward on--my particular job was to kind of move the agency forward on health issues, to look at noise and diesel and other issues for silica, silicosis, for coal miners and other kinds of miners, and we actually made some great progress on that. In fact, coal miners and underground metal and non-metal miners are the only workers in the United States who currently have regulations on them for exposure to diesel exhaust, and that's partly because when you're underground working in a mining environment, you have real concerns. You have diesel equipment underground in that enclosed environment, so their exposures are actually a lot higher than your average worker's exposure.

Hricko

But I think that what was important for me as a transition from that work to the work that I'm doing now is that we were pretty steeped for several years there, three years that I was there, in information about finding the latest scientific information about noise, and the latest scientific information about diesel exhaust, because we had to show in our administrative record that we were relying on the proper science to regulate diesel in the mining environment. So

the noise work and the diesel work that I did in the Clinton administration really put me in good straits when I took this job at USC, to be focusing on some of these traffic-related issues in southern California, which also involve noise and diesel, and other air pollutants, of course, but primarily noise and diesel.

Hricko

No one in southern California has done much research on the noise issue yet, but it's something that our group of scientists is starting to look at. But I think that in terms of the community impacts, it's very important for us in our center here at USC to have a good handle on all of this type of science, so that when questions come up with community groups we really can refer them to a scientific article. We have given community groups all over southern California what's called the Garsheck Study on railroad workers and also a study on truck drivers, looking at the cancer risks for truck drivers and railroad workers who are expose to diesel on a daily basis, and the results show higher lung cancer risks. So we have community groups that know what some of these studies are, and, in fact, one of our community groups with USC with a summer student developed a Goods Movement 101 course, and in that Goods Movement 101 we give the teams of attendees a couple of scientific articles to read. We don't make them read the whole article, pretty much the abstract. But we want them to see what a scientific article looks like and to be able to digest the abstract and be able to say what the methods were and what the results were, so that they feel more confident when they're testifying, to be able to say, "There are studies that show the following." And they actually can comprehend what's in those studies. So that's one of the methods that we use in training.

Collings

That's wonderful. And who do the attendees tend to be? Who tends to come to this from the communities?

Hricko

We've done the training sessions, some for--there's a group, East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, directed by Angelo Logan, one of our Impact Project partners, and they have done two things. One is to train community residents who want to become more involved in actually counting traffic or using the P-Trac air-pollution monitor as part of their community work with East Yards. But East Yards with us also did a training session for other community-based organizations, so that their staff could learn more about goods movement, learn about these scientific studies, and learn how you can incorporate those in your testimony and in your work. So it's several different levels.

Hricko

We also helped to organize a Health Impact Assessment Training. HIAs are relatively new in California. They are sort of a different way of looking at the environmental impacts of a project or a political decision that's going to be made. So, for example, if the 710 Freeway is going to be expanded, you would not only be looking at whether the air pollution is going to be better or worse afterwards, but whether the off ramp might divide a community, or might the off ramp end up in a situation where a park is on one side of the off ramp and the community is on the other side. And so an analysis might be done on, what is the obesity rate like in the cities along the 710 Freeway, which actually turns out to be very high, and what should you be doing about walkability in those cities and access to parks, and is the 710 Freeway going to impede that, or is there any way that improving the 710 could make a positive difference in some of those communities.

Hricko

So we held a health impact assessment training that a lot of leaders of community groups, leaders from the health departments, Long Beach, L.A. County, and other academics went to so that we were all on the same page for understanding how that particular tool might be used in some of these environmental reviews of projects.

Collings

Yes. And I know that you believe that there's a strong component of environmental racism in this work, but is that ever anything that is ever discussed in these community forums, or do you tend to focus on, as you say, the scientific articles and teaching some sort of literacy about scientific methods?

Hricko

There are some organizations even with USC who really focus on environmental-justice research and do a lot of the demographic research that shows some of the environmental injustices. We primarily focus on the health impacts, although if we're submitting comments we will show the demographics of a community. An example, I think, is--and there are lots of differences of opinion about how you look at environmental justice. So, for example, when Caltrans looked at this new SR 47 Expressway, they say, "Well, everybody in that part of L.A. is--." I mean, "All the communities around there are predominantly Latino. So this is going through a predominantly Latino community, so there's no environmental-justice issue." Whereas US EPA has asked Caltrans to look at it more broadly, where you look at like the L.A. metropolitan area and you determine what is the percentage of Latinos in the L.A. metropolitan area, and what is the percentage of Latinos? Or it could be black, depending on the community. And is it higher in Wilmington than it is for L.A. as a whole? Which it is. So there are different ways to look at that, and

disputes about legally how an agency has to look at environmental justice, because they're supposed to be making decisions that are just in terms of race and ethnicity, income.

Collings

Right. And one of the things that strikes me is that people are so busy these days, nobody has time for community involvement, etc. And yet these groups have been so successful engaging the community to do gathering statistics and educating themselves. How do you account for that success?

Hricko

I think that the people who live in these communities really are very seriously impacted. If one looks at the trajectory of the rise in imports at the Port of L.A. from like 1990 to 2009, it's astronomical what's happened. And so the people who live there really have been the first people to notice all extra trucks and all the extra ships coming in, and yard equipment and everything, and the congestion, and then the traffic on the 710, and the railyards that are in Commerce with hundreds of trucks on local streets, going to the railyards. So I think that there is a sense--I was at a meeting the other night, and I actually think it's correct that you have these community residents who are really devoting a lot of their time and hopes that something can be done to make their situation better. They're not participating in a 710 local community in Commerce just to be naysayers. They really want something better to happen. And one gentleman who is eighty years old, Bob Eula, said, "Our community is being carved up. We're only six square miles, and we've got four railyards, and we've got two freeways cutting through our community, and now the 710 Freeway wants to expand or double deck. How much more can this one community take?"

Hricko

And a number of the other residents and members, appointed members of this local advisory committee on the 710 said they felt the same way. So I think that it's something that really is authentic for the residents who are living there. It's something they're facing every day. It's not just some scientific study. They actually believe, and it's very hard with statistics to document whether they are correct or not, but they really believe that they have more asthma and more cancer in their communities than in other communities, and they know for sure and have documented evidence that the emissions that they're breathing from these railyards and the freeways are definitely higher than in other communities.

Collings

And do they tend to believe that there's an environmental-racism component to this? I mean, is that a given among--

Hricko

Some of the groups don't talk about that as much, although they recognize--for example, West Long Beach is a very diverse neighborhood, minority white but not majority Latino. It's got a high percentage of African Americans and Filipinos and Cambodians and Latinos, so it's a very mixed, diverse neighborhood, and they really feel that. I mean, they have a railyard there now that the Port of L.A. in particular really wants to expand--well, both ports do--wants to double in capacity, and then there's another rail company that wants to build another railyard immediately south of there. And there are homes immediately adjacent and schools immediately adjacent, with hundreds of trucks an hour going past them, and people in those communities really do feel that it's because of the diversity of their population and the fact that if that was a completely white part of Long Beach, that railyard would not be placed there. So some groups really feel a very strong environmental justice, or from their perspective, racism, racist attitude going on.

Hricko

Manuel Pastor and some others at USC have looked at this chicken-and-egg question, what was there first? In this particular case, the neighborhood has been there for a really long time and the railyard got built twenty-two years ago, so it's very clear that the neighborhood was there first. But these are really hard issues, and it really takes a lot of political will and very serious planning. And political will, in terms of the Middle Harbor Project, it could have handled 40 percent of the cargo. The 40 percent of cargo that was going to go to the East Coast or to the Midwest, it could have handled it on dock. The harbor commissioners made a decision that they wanted more of that land for the cargo to be handled, and not to have a big railyard there, so these are political decisions that are being made, and the problem is that it's very hard to really have people understand that that political decision is really meaning that you have to expand the railyard next to those homes in West Long Beach, because the harbor commissioners and the mayor, who were promoting the port expansion, weren't considering those kinds of health impacts, and if they really were considering those health impacts they would have had to have had the cargo handled at the port.

Hricko

But they're such complicated issues. Most people have no idea where Middle Harbor is, or where the railyard is in West Long Beach, and so if you're talking about these things in public, people can't really understand the geography of it, let alone all the nuances of the traffic data and the railroad lines and where they go. So it's very complicated, and it's very easy for the voice of the community and for the voice of science to be left out of that, or for there to be a sense that the decisions are being made to really accommodate the science, or to recognize the science and to accommodate the concerns of the community, but

it's just not always the case.So there have been tremendous advances since 2001 in people's perspective. In 2001--I got involved in this in 2002 with regard to the ports. But when I would go to Harbor Commission meetings and talk about health effects, and the residents were finding this more than someone from USC, people just rolled their eyes at you, and that went on for a number of years until finally there was this sense that the health impacts are real, the science shows that the diesel particulate matter for the two ports is the largest source in southern California, that it really is impacting people's health, and so no decisions would get made at this point without recognizing that air pollution is impacting people's health. But I think there are decisions being made that don't take all the mitigation measures that are possible and that should be taken, and with regard to that, then there's a lot of P.R. money being spent to sort of show how green the ports are, when there's a lot more they should be doing to protect health.

Collings

Right.

Hricko

And I can't get into all of those politics in the testimony and in the analyses that we tried to do, and yet underneath all of that, these are the realities. So if someone is in Santa Monica or Brentwood or the West Side, first of all, there are many fewer articles in the L.A. Times, because the L.A. Times has gotten rid of a lot of their environmental reporters, so they're not reading about problems at the ports anymore. If they hear about it at all, it's how green the two ports are. And so it's hard to even explain that there are still very serious local and regional health effects that are happening because of the huge amounts of trucks, and the shipping emissions are now known to be much more significant a problem with regard to diesel particulate, but also for climate change. So there are lots of issues that still have to be dealt with, but I think it's easy for the public to think, oh, what a fight that was, but it's over. Congratulations. But there are going to be years and years of work to try to really be sure that some of these so-called green measures are actually implemented, and that they don't go the wayside of the downturn in the economy if that continues.

Collings

Right. Do the community members who participate and gather this data and involve themselves regularly--is it primarily women? Or is that not a fair statement?

Hricko

Well, that's interesting. Most of the A-Teams are women. Certainly the CCAEJ in Riverside and the Wilmington group and the Long Beach Alliance [for Children with Asthma] group, they're almost all women. They're almost all

Spanish-speaking Latinas, and many of them have become, or a number of them have become very empowered, because they now understand the science better, and they understand more about the issues, and they are very effective spokespeople. But I would say that the group in Commerce, like the group the other night sitting around the table from the local area, East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, it seems like they have a lot of men in their community who are actively engaged, so I don't know.

Hricko

Now, Penny Newman's a woman. She has mostly woman who are engaged. Long Beach Alliance is led by a woman, so I'm not quite sure. But I know that East Yard Communities has a lot of--Bob Eula, for example, who's eighty, who's lived in that community for decades, is a very active participant in the East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice. And there were all men sitting around the table in their group. There weren't any women who were on that committee.

Collings

What about Jesse Marquez's group? Is that sort of mixed?

Hricko

Well, Jesse's, I think one of his organizers, who's a woman, discovered that there was a group of mothers at Banning High School who were really interested in air pollution, and so his neighborhood assessment team is from the parents' group, and the parents at the Banning High School group are women, so his group is all women also, except for Jesse.

Collings

I see. Right, right. Is that because they have possibly--I don't know, I mean, do they have more time? I mean, is this sort of speaking to the issue of, well, there was once a time in the past when women weren't working, or--

Hricko

Well, I think it's some of that, and sometimes some of these women have young children at home, so they're not in the workforce.

Collings

That's what I meant.

Hricko

They might have a younger child at home. And the neighborhood assessment teams, the way we set them up is to have stipends, so that if they are trained and they do this work, they get stipends for the training and they get stipends for the work that they do, so it adds some to their income. Whereas, you're right, very likely their husbands we hope have some kind of full-time job.

Collings

All right. So you were saying that there was a kind of a watershed, there was sort of a time when at first you would go to hearings and nobody was really

aware of what was going on, and then the information became more of sort of a given. Would you say that that had to do with the reporting that you spoke about last time, from Deborah Schoch's reporting? Or would you point to another set of circumstances?

Hricko

I think it's several things, and I've had some residents from the San Pedro Peninsula Homeowners Group say this to me, that they had been through the nineties arguing with the Port of L.A. that something had to be done, and that no one would listen to them, and then it wasn't until the early 2000s, like end of 2001, 2002, that a number of things kind of happened. One is that the NRDC sued the port over the China Shipping terminal and won a big environmental--won this settlement of 50 million dollars from the port for mitigation. So that was one thing, and, of course, that was very widely reported. Everyone knew about that.

Hricko

Around that same time, we started going to all these hearings and presenting the actual scientific studies, so the community groups say that they had been sort of complaining, but all of a sudden there's legal people saying, "You're not looking at the environmental review right." There are scientists saying, "Look at the science. It shows that air pollution is causing health impacts, and especially when you're really close to the source of mobile-source pollution." And then you also had right around that time a MATES-2 Report came out of the Air Quality Management District that showed areas in darker colors where there was a lot of diesel exhaust, and so the area around the ports and the freeways were in these bright colors that had them recognize what was happening. And then these community groups started to really organize, not just the homeowners' organizations, but some different groups that were more of a broader coalition of residents.

Hricko

And this regional interest happened with the 2001 town meeting that we had, where people were saying, "This is a regional issue and we really need to be looking at it." So I think there was this convergence. And then I really give credit to Deborah Schoch, the reporter from the L.A. Times who either asked for or was--she was put onto the Long Beach beat, but she used that to focus on ports and goods movement, and she knew what was happening inside and out, more than anyone did before or since. She did that beat for a couple of years, and during that time there were an amazing number of stories in the L.A. Times about the problems of the ports, the railyards causing a higher cancer risk, the warehouses, so these regional issues and the local railyards in West Long Beach even, and hundreds of people turning out for meetings, hearings about it, got reported on. So there was kind of groundswell of science and legal work

and advocacy and community organizing and really solid media coverage that made a huge difference, and I think if that all hadn't come together, we wouldn't be looking--and then Mayor Villaraigosa appointing new harbor commissioners. So I think that all of that coming together at the time it did is what led to this sense that there needed to be a Clean Air Action Plan at the port, and there really needed to be a real attempt to solve some of these problems.

Collings

So when you point to the media, the legal issues, I mean, how significant then would the role of individuals, I might even say sort of charismatic individuals such as Penny Newman and Jesse Marquez and Angelo Logan organizing their communities, how important is that piece of it?

Hricko

I think it's been very important, and they are charismatic individuals, but very respected by their peers, by the residents in the community, but by higher-level government officials. And so I think because they have the ability to really work on many levels like that, and they're respected by the government officials, they've been very effective. And I think that when you have from Commerce regularly speaking at the Port of Long Beach or Port of Los Angeles about what the ports need to do to stop or prevent these off-port impacts, they're really all of a sudden hearing things from a different perspective than what they had felt was just the residents whining about not wanting to have a crane in their backyard, or blocking their view of the harbor. And all of a sudden there was this sense of people regionally, I mean Jesse, but also the Long Beach Alliance, and the Long Beach Alliance isn't just going to the Long Beach Port hearings, they're going to the L.A. Port hearings, and they're going to SCAG [Southern California Association of Governments], and a lot of us had been appointed to positions in these different taskforces and different government agencies that are looking at the health impacts and the community impacts.

Hricko

I'll give you an example. The Southern California Association of Governments has had a goods-movement working group or a goods-movement taskforce for at least a decade, and it was two years ago or three years ago when a number of us would go to a SCAG goods-movement meeting. So we would be at the microphone as someone from the audience who has three minutes to have a comment. So I would present some of the scientific studies. If we had new studies coming out of USC, I would present what those studies were. Perhaps there might be another meeting where Angelo Logan would present some information about the 710 Freeway, and Jesse Marquez would be presenting something at the ports, and Penny Newman or Rachel Lopez would be talking

about impacts in Riverside that needed to be considered, and then five of us got appointed to that committee. They had never had anyone who didn't represent the railroads or the transportation industry in some way, or elected officials on the committee before, so all of a sudden there were different voices being heard.

Hricko

And we managed to have some scientists. Tom [Thomas] Mack, one of our cancer epidemiologists, came and presented on his cancer book, which looked at census tracts and what the cancer rates were, and the fact that he had found higher rates of cancer along the 710 Freeway and down near the port, and that that was something that really needed to be understood by a committee like this. And John Froines from UCLA presented on ultrafine particles and some of the science. Ed Avall spoke about emissions from ships and trucks. So I think that we've been trying to change the debate so science is more a part of the debate, and certainly the community-based organizations have been trying to be sure that the impact on community residents is no longer left out of the discussion.

Collings

Right, right. And this is probably just by accident, but the first community group you mentioned as an example of sort of having a presence and making an impact was the one from Commerce, which is the one that you mentioned. It was like an all-male group. Did that group have more of an effect as more of a male group, do you think?

Hricko

Well, the group isn't male. I mean, the staff is female. Angelo is male, but--

Collings

But the participants, the community participants.

Hricko

--and I think when they have a community meeting you have mixed, but I'm just saying that it seems like they have a lot of leaders, and when I first worked with training people how to do measurements with the P-Trac it was a couple of men from their group who were interested in it, so I think it's just a different dynamic. No, I don't think it's sexist--

Collings

It's just curious.

Hricko

--that they're listening more, because Jesse also--Jesse's from the port area, but I think that it's been important to have these organizations from outside the port letting the port know that the impacts are far and wide.

Collings

Right. Now, if the port, as you say, if the Port of Long Beach, if they're putting more money into publicity than into environmental issues, does that mean that the Impact Project, for example, needs to start working on publicity as well?

Hricko

That's a hard one, because talk about a group that has no publicity budget. [laughs] We don't. But it's almost impossible to counteract messaging when a port is spending 6 million dollars a year on promotion and videos and public relations and tours. It's bus sides and billboards. That's impossible. It's impossible to combat that. And the only thing I think anybody would want to combat is that the sense that the Port of Long Beach is like the world's greenest port, or that that terminal that they just approved is going to be the world's greenest terminal, it's just really not true from the statistics and the traffic figures and what it will be doing to the southern California health landscape, if you will. But there's no way to really--

Collings

Because it seems like it's almost like you're at a sort of a turning point, where a lot of that data has come out, a lot of that work has been done, and--

Hricko

I think it is a little bit of a turning point. I think the easy part is behind us, and I do think that it's going to be much harder in the future to have--for example, we now have a lot of new science about proximity to freeways and busy roads and railyards, and I think the railyard issue we'll be able to focus on, but the freeway issue, we're so inundated with freeways in southern California that it's very hard to make the arguments about expanding freeways, and, of course, what we're looking at primarily is expanding them for the purposes of accommodating more goods coming in from the ports. But these are going to be harder issues, I think. And Caltrans, frankly, is very behind the times in terms of their understanding of science or their interest in wanting to have the best science as part of their decision making.

Hricko

So I think that it's almost like Caltrans is where--there's been so much focus in trying to have the ports and the port authorities really understand that there are health impacts from the air pollution at the ports and the related impacts of that. But when you get to something like the expansion of the 710 Freeway, the decisions will be made by Caltrans on how to expand that and how to incorporate health concerns. And, in fact, the process in doing that, the public-participation process was so flawed at the beginning that most of the residents, even those who were going to lose their homes in the original plan for expanding the 710 Freeway, learned about it from either a Long Beach Press Telegram article or a Deborah Schoch article in the L.A. Times, and then outrage just took over. And Caltrans and Metro were just partly responsible for

the 710 expansion. They were overseeing like the environmental effects. They had to really step back and set up all kinds of community meetings, and they probably lost a couple of years in their process because of not involving the community from the beginning.

Hricko

And so now there are multiple levels of committees and a number of us are on those committees, but it's very difficult to get some of these scientific--there aren't any scientists at Caltrans. I mean, there aren't any health-effect scientists at Caltrans.

Collings

It's astonishing.

Hricko

And so we can't even figure out who we should be meeting with, to talk to them about how they make decisions on health policy. They have a group at UC Davis that seems to be kind of their air-quality research component and at some level their air-quality decision makers, and maybe that's okay to not have the capacity within the agency. It's seems a little strange to me. But all I know is that those of us trying to get the information out about the science that exists are having a really hard time trying to figure out who to talk to at Caltrans to help them better understand what these impacts are. And it's not just Caltrans. It goes up to the Federal Highway Administration, and maybe some of that will change in the new administration and some of that will filter down, but it's unclear.

Collings

Yes.[End of interview]

1.3. Session 3 (June 8, 2009)

Collings

Today is June 8, 2009, Jane Collings interviewing Andrea Hricko in her office. Before we get on to talking about THE Impact Project, I did want to just ask you a follow up. You had mentioned last time that you had a postdoc who was working on what you called good messaging to community groups about gene-environment interactions, and because we had sort of talked a little bit about the notion of public relations I wondered, if you think this is sort of a good path, what you meant by good messaging to community groups.

Hricko

Well, the genetic issue is really hard to get across to the public, and it's also really hard in terms of regulations to figure out what you do. So, for example, if it turns out that children who live really close to a freeway are more likely to have reduced lung function or are more likely to develop asthma, that's pretty

straightforward. But if it turns out that the children who live close to the freeway who are most likely to develop those conditions are actually ones who have a particular genetic makeup, so that within the group of children living close to a freeway you have a susceptible group where genetically they're susceptible, that's a really hard message to get across to people, because there isn't anything that can actually, at least in this day and age, be done about that. We're not going to find out everyone's genetic makeup and then determine who is okay to live next to a freeway. We just wouldn't be doing that.

Hricko

And we also don't have regulations right now that look at some people as being more genetically susceptible to the health effects of air pollution. So there within that is a messaging issue. How do you talk to people about the latest advances in science that are starting to look at genes and gene-environment interactions and have people understand that, and then if they understand it, how do they understand what it means to them personally, or what it means to their neighborhood or community or state? So we have a young woman who's doing a postdoc, and it is in the topic of genetics and environment, gene-environment interactions, and we thought that that was one of the things that she might look at. She has a lot of community experience and with her background--she was a minister, and she's also done some other health programs with the African American community--how would you get across those concepts in a way that would be understandable and useful to people?

Hricko

There's a lot of concern, of course, about genetic testing and how it could be used against people. But we've been actually quite successful in our studies in having parents allow their children to be tested. So it's an upcoming area of research, or right now a popular area of research, and looking at how you communicate the results of that to the public is important.

Collings

Right. And maybe we're jumping ahead, but do any of the perhaps partners in the Impact Project, for example, have concerns that maybe looking at genetic predisposition might be sort of getting off the track of the environmental-justice focus?

Hricko

No one has really, and I think that it's because they actually understand maybe better than most groups these issues of susceptibility, although, of course, they are worried about discrimination, too, which is what you're raising really. But we have found that the community groups are interested in these susceptibility issues, and they can recognize from their own families that some people smoke until they're ninety and don't get sick, and other people die at forty of lung cancer, so they've recognized those susceptibilities themselves.

Collings

All right. Also, you said that you were at sort of a turning point in this struggle, because of the increased port publicity, and you mentioned their budget and the new obstacles that were posed by dealing with Caltrans, as you said, because they didn't seem to have much of an interest in the health-effect science. I was just noticing this editorial, if I can find it now--I may have left it behind as I was looking at it. But it was an editorial that you had written about four years ago on this topic.

Hricko

Oh, for environmental-health perspectives.

Collings

Yes, exactly. And I was wondering, three years on--in that one you seem to be sort of drawing attention to the issue.

Hricko

Right. We were drawing attention to the issue, which was gaining interest in southern California, but on the national level had really not been recognized. And since that time there actually was the National Environmental Justice Advisory Committee, which is an E-J committee set up by the US EPA. They set up a special goods-movement taskforce that I'm on, and a couple of community members from California got added to that taskforce. So my particular role is to draw attention within that to the health effects that are happening from diesel pollution and other air pollution around railyards and from ship emissions and along truck-congested freeways. So there's been an increasing interest in it, but as there has, there really has been this increasing greenwashing, if you will, that everything the two ports are doing is green, and a sense by the railyards that they can build green railyards, and the term is being used so freely that it's hard to understand what's really behind it.

Hricko

That's where we get concerned with the large budgets of public-relations executives working to try to put messages out that these new projects are completely green and will be the greenest in the world. They are still very polluting. Even if you're cutting the pollution in half, there's still lots of pollution and lots of potential for health effects. So we are worried about a couple of things. One, the ports doing that, but also the railroads claiming that they can build really safe and clean railyards, when there is not one example anywhere in the country of that having happened. Also, as stimulus money is coming down from the new administration for economic recovery, a lot of that money is going to road building, and when you have a state agency that has very little capabilities of evaluating the scientific research, then we're worried that freeway projects will just go forward in the same way they have in this

state for the last sixty years, without much attention to the health effects that the freeway traffic and pollution is causing.

Collings

Yes, okay. So you've got the message out, but you're concerned that it's being co-opted a bit.

Hricko

A bit. And you have the harbor commissioners saying, "We know that the footprint of the port is very toxic," one of them said to me, "but we're working on it. We're solving that problem." And definitely both ports are doing a lot of work to try to change what's happening, but there's a long way to go to get the ports cleaned up, and I think the messaging problem for the public is that the ports' messaging is so effective that it makes it seem like the problem has been solved and now we can just move forward and keep growing, and in reality the problems have not been solved.

Collings

So will there need to be any kind of like change of strategy on the part of groups such as THE Impact Project to meet that challenge?

Hricko

Well, I think that THE Impact Project partners and we at USC have worked very hard to try to get out accurate information, for example, about railyards, and that if you have a railyard in a local community, not only do you have the locomotives and the yard equipment that are polluting that community, but you have thousands of trucks that are traveling on a freeway, often past schools and homes to get to that railyard, so really trying to look systematically at how southern California could operate its goods-movement system more like a system, so that there's not just a decision, "Well, we need another railyard. Let's put it in four miles to the ports in West Long Beach," right next to homes and schools, but to really be looking at whether there maybe really is enough space at the port to put a railyard, and to have it in that industrial area and controlled would be better than putting another railyard in a local community where we have evidence--the eighteen railyards in California that have been studied all have elevated cancer risks from the diesel emissions. So we know it's not a good idea in this day and age, with the science that we know about air pollution causing health effect, cardiovascular disease, diesel causing cancer, living close to a freeway or busy road or railyard being linked with reduced lung function and increased risk of asthma. We know all of those things happen. So we really need to be relying on that science in making our decisions, and not making the same mistakes all over again.

Collings

Yes. So how did THE Impact Project--first of all, THE Impact Project, THE, Trade, Health, Environment--how did it come together? What was the impetus for that in the very beginning?

Hricko

Well, many of us had worked together in the past. When I was a journalist I had interviewed Penny Newman when she was working on the Stringfellow Acid Pits, and I've known Bob [Robert] Gottlieb for twenty-five years. Then there were some new groups that got started around the year 2001. We also in 2001 had our first town meeting, and at that town meeting Penny Newman was raising the regional issues that there are with ports. And 2001 was when we actually at USC and UCLA first had this lightbulb go off about the ports being much more of an air-pollution problem than we had realized.

Hricko

After 2001 a number of us started meeting, and a couple of those groups actually got together to form a railroad coalition, looking at some of the railroad issues, and I was instrumental in introducing some of those people, some of the groups to each other. Penny is fifty miles away in Riverside, so Angelo Logan, who started a new group along the 710 Freeway didn't necessarily know of Penny. But once I sort of realized there were all these intersecting issues about warehouses in Riverside and railyards in Riverside and the same conditions happening here, we got those groups together.

Hricko

So at that point USC was kind of working with each of those groups, providing technical assistance, or letting them know when the latest scientific studies came out and how those could be interpreted. And then as we all worked together, we realized that we really had a very good community-academic coalition, and there's a lot of interest. We had been engaged with CCAEJ and the Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma on a formal federal government NIH grant that was a community-based, participatory-research grant, CBPR they call it, so that we were formally partnered with those two community groups. So we already had a really close sort of scientific and community partnership going, and we added the additional partners who had all come together around the railroad issue and decided that we had a really dynamic opportunity here to be working together, and then added Occidental College's Urban and Environmental Policy Institute as a policy arm to the work that we were doing.

Hricko

So formally, we actually got started before 2006, but our partnership was funded by the California Endowment in 2006, and I think what it does is not only give us better access to getting our scientific information out to community groups, but we learn a lot at the university from the concerns that

community members are facing and the struggles that they're involved in. So, for example, we know that there's a tremendous amount of traffic along the 710 Freeway, and some of our scientists at UCLA have documented that in terms of the--if you go 300 meters out from the freeway, the pollution is much less, and as you get closer and closer to the freeway the pollution levels are higher. Well, that's interesting to know these people live and there are some schools within those 300 meters.

Hricko

But also we learned from the community that there's a lot of obesity, that community members can't walk around very much in their communities, there are these big-rig trucks everywhere. When we meet with the State Health Department and County Health Department we learn that there's high diabetes rates. Well, air pollution affects diabetes in terms of diabetes often leads to cardiovascular disease, and air pollution definitely impacts cardiovascular disease. So there are a lot of insights we gain at the university from working with the community, and a lot of community knowledge that we gain about the ports expanding and the railyards expanding and what's happening with the 710 Freeway, so that when we combine our efforts and strategies, we're much more powerful.

Collings

Now, are there ever any times when--you sort of mentioned, at one point you said that when you came here to USC, you said that the outreach that was being done was, for example, to K-through-twelve, and that when some of you began to be beginning to do more political work, you had to watch what you were doing so that you didn't overstep your bounds, because you work for a university, and you said it was tricky because you had to point to the port problem and the truck problem--

Hricko

Well, it is tricky, I think. I mean, I think that there are maybe twenty centers like ours funded by the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences, and it is easier to work on training teachers how to teach an environmental-health curriculum. You're not going to get in much trouble for that. But when you become engaged in some of these very real problems that are happening in the community, which some of the centers do, like ours, but when you're involved in lead poisoning in the community, or a factory, or siting of a bus depot in New York City, or siting of a port terminal in Los Angeles, it does become more political, only because those development decisions become very political.

Hricko

So the work that we're doing isn't exactly political, but we are in that political arena. So we're presenting the scientific information, the latest scientific results

to harbor commissioners and to elected officials and community-based organizations and at community meetings, and we're in a sense a little bit out there in the fray of what's happening, because what we're trying to do is to have all of those different officials and decision makers pay more attention to the science and not be making decisions just based on economic development, but really be thinking about people's health. And for them to do that we have to present the real science that's been peer reviewed and published, and some of our scientists at USC and UCLA in our center are the leaders in the country or the world on these issues of air pollution, children's health effect, ultrafine particles from diesel exhaust and what kinds of toxicity those particles have. So we really have a wealth of information to get out to the public and to the policy makers on this issue.

Collings

So do you feel that working with these community groups such as CCAEJ and East Yards and what have you provides some sort of cover, rather than just sort of being kind of out there in the political fray raising these charges--

Hricko

Well, I wouldn't say cover at all. But I think what it does is it allows us to be presenting the science, and it allows us to train our community members in understanding that science so when they present it, they're accurate, and when they present the science that they know the right way to understand what the results are. And, frankly, they are the ones doing the political work, if you will. If there's a rally, they're the ones organizing a rally or a demonstration. We don't get involved in that. So we have different roles, and I think that each of the partners in the group learns from other partners in a way that enhances their own understanding of either the issue or the science or the policy options that there are to solve a problem.

Hricko

And as a result, we're the ones who are--they're more advocates. They're advocates and we are more providing testimony and speaking and writing briefs and policy information that people can draw upon in their advocacy efforts.

Collings

Yes. It sounds like a great complementary organism, a wonderful symbiotic organism. The various groups, do you talk in these terms? Like it's understood whose role is what?

Hricko

Oh, yes. For example, several of the community partners are working trying to get the ARB to establish some rules, some new regulations on railyard exposures and trying to reduce diesel emissions at railyards, and they're really doing that. They've had petitions and a lawsuit and different ways of

approaching it. And we have taken--the state did studies of eighteen railyards. We took those eighteen railyards. We've done a report on one of them which wants to expand, just to report everything that's been done on that railyard so the public can see the science behind it, the air monitoring that's been done, none of which is a very pretty picture, but we've packaged it in a report so people can find it in one place.

Hricko

But then the next step in really trying to fight a railyard expansion would be the residents who live in that community, or the community members. We are often called in to present the scientific studies at a meeting that they might hold, but they're the ones who are strategizing how to move forward.

Collings

Is this a group that has a life cycle, do you think?

Hricko

Well, we just got funded for three more years, so that's one life cycle. We've had three years that we've operated, and we have three more years, so that's six years, and it's not easy. These community-academic partnerships are very difficult. We are the sort of financial lead or the fiscal lead of the project, but the university operates really slowly. It drives all of us crazy. But the deadlines that we sometimes see in terms of trying to move a report forward may not be the same kind of deadline that some of the community groups are operating on, so we have a lot of struggles. It's not easy. You have to really--those kinds of partnerships really take a lot of nurturing and a lot of time, and they're not common in academia because they take so much time. Typically you have someone who's trying to get tenure and publish a lot, and it doesn't necessarily lead to a lot of publications, so you have to have a department that understands some of that.

Hricko

But the rewards, I think, are many when you can actually have a partnership work and can effectively work together. I think that we have very research-literate communities that we're working with, people who are really hungry for more research and how they can use those research findings in the campaigns that they have. So in that regard we really can work with each other. For example, one of our scientists did a book about cancer risks in L.A. County, and when he put together all the census tracts he would look to see whether there are any particular kinds of cancer where you have several census tracts that are contiguous with an unusual kind of cancer, let's say. And so along the 710 Freeway and near the port he has found that there are higher incidents of oral-pharyngeal cancers, mouth-and-throat cancers, than you would expect. And anecdotally when we've talked to people in Commerce or Long Beach, I mean, it seems kind of weird that I know three people from--it's a very rare

cancer, but of the different people we know working on port things, I know three people who have that type of cancer.

Hricko

So we're going to be working with the community groups and the scientists to try to elucidate what's happening along the 710 and do additional analyses, maybe do some monitoring, air monitoring, to try to figure that out more. Also, the cancers seem to be on the side of the 710, on the east side where the wind blows more towards the east, but it's just the beginnings of a possibility, because tallying all the cancer cases that have been reported in L.A. County over the years, when you have a rare cancer you're putting a lot of years together, and you just don't know quite what you're looking at until you do more careful analyses.

Collings

Well, with all of these numbers coming out, you would think that the ports would start to be worried about the possibility of like maybe some class-action lawsuits or other kinds of--

Hricko

I've heard people occasionally mention something like that, but I don't know whether those kinds of things are possible. But certainly, nothing has quite gone forward on it. I know that the people who live near the Union Pacific Railyard in West Long Beach are very concerned about their twenty-three years of diesel emissions that they're breathing in West Long Beach from that particular facility, which is documented to have the fourth-highest diesel-cancer risk of a railyard in the state. And the company really is saying that they don't plan to clean it up unless they're allowed to expand and become larger, so the port is entertaining an application from Union Pacific to expand. But the community feels that there's not a very good record of them operating cleanly. And the science, actually the report that I put together on that particular railyard, there's been a lot of monitoring done in that particular community, because there's a school very close, and that school, according to the Air Quality Management District, has the highest levels of elemental carbon as a marker for diesel exhaust of anyplace the AQMD is measured. So there are a lot of bad signs in terms of what's currently happening that lead some of the residents to not trust that if they're allowed to double in size that they'll put in a really clean new facility.

Collings

Yes, because the Stringfellow case was a class-action lawsuit based--

Hricko

I don't know.

Collings

Yes, based on health effects.

Hricko

Okay, I didn't know that.

Collings

Yes. Are there ever any instances where community groups bring concerns forward that other members, like perhaps the university component, sort of feels like, "I just don't really--we don't really see how that's going to pan out"?

Hricko

Well, we have had some differences with one of our community partners who would like to do a huge survey of his community, and he has taken some of his staff and volunteers to do, like, health surveys on part of the community, and so we've had real differences, because it isn't the way we would do that scientific study. We don't think it's very practical to try to do the study of an entire community, and you have to have a--

Collings

You have to have certain methodologies.

Hricko

You have to know what your denominator is and know what you're comparing it to, and also there are issues about not having a human-subjects review board at the community. You have community members asking people medical questions; how can you be sure that it's secure? So we have run into issues like that. And in this particular case, we don't really want to be giving sort of spotty advice on do this and do that, because we don't really think conceptually it works as an idea. So, yes, there are times even with our own partners that we run into those kinds of snags, if you will, differences in scientific opinion or differences in what somebody might view as a good community strategy but we don't think is a scientifically sound way to go.

Hricko

And then there are some community groups that have really been pushing putting filters into schools, and even though that might be helpful, and it appears that it might be, it's really hard to outfit an entire school with filters, especially when there's no inside gym and the kids play outside where the air is dirty, and so a little bit of a sense that putting air filters in may give a false impression that the air is clean.

Collings

Is that Cabrillo High School that you're referring to?

Hricko

Well, it started at Hudson, but it's being discussed at Cabrillo, it's being discussed as part of the Middle Harbor new terminal at the Port of Long Beach. They have money for filters. So there's a lot of discussion.

Collings

So you feel like in those cases, having the air filters inside is just going to give sort of a free pass to the local polluters?

Hricko

Well, I think it takes away some of the pressure to really clean up the air. I mean, you have to really clean up the trucks, and it seems as a long-term solution it's much more important to clean up the diesel exhaust and have clean trucks or electric trucks or an electric guideway, the alternative technology, than it is to be putting filters in that are going to take years of maintenance and changing and cost money down the road also. And I think that if the air pollution is so bad and the Clean Trucks Program doesn't go through, and that's your only choice, then the filters, I think, are useful, but I don't think they should be your first line of defense. So there's been some concern about this real push by some of the groups to be getting more and more filters as a mitigation measure. I think it probably can help protect children. You have to be really careful. Apparently, if you open one window or one door in a room that has the filter in it, it completely overrides the effectiveness of it.

Collings

Yes, I would think so. You'd have to have sort of like double vacuum, double doors and everything, I would think. Now, is this community-research partnership something that you could go to an academic conference and kind of explain to others how something like this might be put together? Or do you think that this is a particular--

Hricko

Oh, we do that all the time. We spoke last year at the American Public Health Association convention, another meeting of the International Society of Exposure Assessment and International Society of Environmental Epidemiologists, and also the NIH holds meetings where they talk about what people are doing in terms of outreach, so people are very interested in it. So I talk about the really great things, but also the difficulties that there are and the ways you have to be careful with the strategies that you're coming up with and which parts of them are scientific. We also as part of that--we'll come back to, I think--are doing media work also to try to get the messaging out. But there's a lot of interest in community-based participatory research and how you can get universities to really be engaged more with a community.

Hricko

I would say that when I mention that some groups have done very effective work with teachers, in training teachers about environmental health in the K-to-twelve community, and it never gets them into very much trouble. That's still great that they're doing it, but you're not going to get your hand slapped for it. But I would say that within the university one of the most likely things you have students do is to be engaged in like doing tutoring or working with

students after school, and again, that's really important. But I think actually getting students and faculty out into the community to help solve some of the real-life problems that are there is also really an important thing to do.

Hricko

At our university the engineering department has very practical projects that they do. In their writing program they give their students a project in the community to do, and I think the Marshall School of Business also does that, but there aren't a lot of community models for that. Canada has a lot of groups that work kind of the way ours does. But I would argue that my particular role as a faculty member and a community outreach director within our NIH-funded Center on Environmental Health, that you really need someone in this kind of liaison role between a group of scientists who are very dedicated to the scientific work that they're doing, and the community. When the scientists reach out to the community, or the community reaches out to the scientists without someone who is trying to help broker that, it often is really difficult, and it may not work out really well. But having somebody in between whose job it is to try to make those linkages and to have the community be able to work with the scientists and draw upon their scientific research, and the scientists to be able to sort of have a better relationship with the community-based groups, having somebody as that liaison I think is really important. But it's a luxury, I think, that there probably are, I think, twenty people in this particular position. Or with the other centers, maybe there's more like forty people in the country who play this liaison role, and yet it's really critical.

Collings

Yes, without that I really couldn't even see how it would work.

Hricko

It's very hard. It's very hard if a community group just writes an e-mail to a faculty member. It's hard to evaluate who the group is and what they work on and whether the concerns are legitimate. But having someone--and now we have a staff here--working on those issues really helps.

Collings

Was Penny Newman the first person that you knew from this group? I mean, is that sort of how all the contacts grew, from you knowing Penny Newman? Because she's someone who has really educated herself on these issues, and she's--

Hricko

Right. Well, Penny is a total leader in this whole environmental-justice movement.

Collings

Yes, exactly, exactly.

Hricko

As are folks in San Diego who we worked with actually before we worked with some of the local groups. We had an environmental-justice partnership with a group called the Environmental Health Coalition in San Diego, and I would say that that group, Environmental Health Coalition, and Penny Newman's Center for Community Action in Environmental Justice are two of the leading organizations in the state who are doing really solid community organizing and really work to understand the science. We had a partnership, again funded by the NIEHS with the Environmental Health Coalition in San Diego for a number of years.

Hricko

Then it really was after our 2001 town meeting that we realized that there were these other groups that really worked for us in terms of the science that we were doing. In other words, if a group is working on lead poisoning, it's a really important public health issue, but we don't have any scientists in our center who are working on lead poisoning. But once we identified certain groups that were focused on air-pollution concerns and air pollution from freeways and proximity to freeways, and our scientists were doing exactly that kind of research, well, there really was an obvious bond. So Penny actually did not introduce me to Jesse and Angelo. Once we met, then we introduced them to Penny.

Collings

Oh, okay.

Hricko

But the connections were very quickly made and very strong, because of the similar interests in the groups.

Collings

Okay. Would you like to talk a little bit about the Moving Forward conference, which THE Impact Project put together?

Hricko

Well, USC is the main partner. Our center had this 2001 conference which was very successful, and that's where we really got interested in the whole ports and goods-movement issue. We had another conference then in 2005, and again it was organized by USC and our community outreach program. But we had a lot of community partners added to that, so it would be actually all the people who are part of our Impact Project now, but other organizations like the Coalition for Clean Air and Natural Resources Defense Council, which is very involved in all these port-related issues, so we probably had twenty-five community partners, and that meeting was strictly about ports and goods-movement and health issues. We had about 400 people at that conference.

Hricko

And then two years later, as we were getting inklings from around the country of other places where problems were brewing at the Port of Charleston or Vancouver ports, the border crossing into Canada with trucks, we decided that our next conference should have more of a national or North American if you will focus, and we ended up with 550 participants from sixteen states and four countries and people from other ports, and you know, a man from the middle of Kansas whose property was going to be taken away to build warehouses to support a new railyard in Kansas. Well, he got to the conference and said, "I didn't think I'd have anything in common with anyone here, and, in fact, I have something in common with everyone here. I felt alone, but I'm not alone at all." And there was a sense of real camaraderie with the groups that were working on this.

Hricko

And so what we've done at all of our town meetings is we've had several hours of scientific presentations with some of our scientists doing the research that we think at that time is the most critical to have the community groups here, and then we will have open microphones where people can just get up and talk about what their concerns are, and then some panel discussions about strategies for change, and that conference was very exciting. People really said they wanted to have a national communications network to be able to keep sharing this kind of information.

Hricko

We're actually finally getting around to thinking we might establish something called the Ning, N-i-n-g, which probably by the time this is ever archived will be popularized and gone, but a Ning is something that's a very easy tool for social networking, especially around particular causes. So if we have a ports, goods-movement, and health impacts website, and everyone from our conference can be part of it, it means that anybody who hears about a conference coming up can post that conference. There can be a blog right on that, and you can list the names of the organizations, we can put information on our 2010 conference that we're already starting to plan. So it was very exciting to see so many people who really felt they had a lot to learn and share with each other on this issue.

Hricko

If you think about it, one of the problems that the ports have economically is the Port of Los Angeles, of Long Beach, they don't want to be spending a huge amount of money on greening their ports and then have shipping lines decide they're going to go to Charleston instead, because it doesn't cost as much to go to Charleston, because Charleston--

Collings

Or Punta Colonet?

Hricko

Punta Colonet, Mexico, or Savannah, Georgia, or Prince Rupert, Canada. They're really worried that there be some kind of an evening of the baseline so that they don't lose business because of the fact that they're trying to be green, that they still can remain competitive. So the more that people in South Carolina and Seattle and Savannah, Georgia, and New York know is happening elsewhere as models for what they could be asking for to reduce the health impacts, the more likely it will be that you'd end up down the road with some kind of national landscape where everyone has to meet at least these particular rules. Maybe California will always be ahead, as they are in many environmental issues, but that's a real concern.

Collings

Yes. When people were attending the conference nationwide, did you get the sense that they were coming in and learning from THE Impact Project, or was it sort of going both ways?

Hricko

I think we were learning a lot about the impacts in other communities and how far behind some of those communities are compared to what's been happening over the last now eight years, nine years in Los Angeles. For example, the Port of Charleston, South Carolina, the agendas are not posted on a website for their harbor commissions meetings, and I actually called to find out if I could get a copy of the minutes, and they said, "Well, nobody has ever asked for those before. I think you'd have to file a formal request to get a copy of the minutes."

Collings

Freedom of Information Act.

Hricko

Freedom of Information Act request. Meanwhile, at the Ports of L.A. and Long Beach they're live webcast, and their webcasts are archived, and the archives have a table of contents and you can search the archives for someone who spoke, so it's completely different. And all that's changed over the last five years at our ports also, but it means that those ports are at least five or nine years behind where we are.

Collings

Yes. Now, why is it that they make all of that information so available?

Hricko

People have been demanding it.

Collings

Pressure.

Hricko

Yes. Residents have been demanding. If they couldn't come to the harbor commission meeting, they want to know what happened, so they want to read

the minutes. The minutes have very sparse things like, "Jane Collings spoke about Middle Harbor." And somebody would say, "Well, was she in favor of it, or was she opposed to it?" And so eventually they began to videotape them, and they would save the videotapes and then people couldn't come to the meeting, and so then they asked for webcasts. So one thing has really led to another. But as a result, the ports are much more open than they ever had been about what they're doing.

Collings

Do you have a sense of the origin of the term goods movement?

Hricko

It just means moving goods.

Collings

I know, I know, but--

Hricko

It's such a bad terms, and no one can come up with a catchy phrase. Freight transport is the best anyone has come up with, and that, I think, really smacks of trains when you say freight transport. I don't think you think of ships, and I don't think you think of trucks. So no one's been able to figure out a good terms for goods movement that would make people understand what it is. Global trade sometimes we call that, but then people might think about people in China who are making products, or about our international agreements on global trade, so talk about messaging.

Collings

Yes, exactly.

Hricko

We definitely need someone to message a better phrase than goods movement.

Collings

Yes, because it makes it sound so yummy.

Hricko

Ed Avall, one of our professors, was asked to do a talk on goods movement at Seattle, University of Washington, and his name of his talk was "Goods Movement, the Goods, the Bads, and the Uglies." [laughs]

Collings

Yes, that's a good one. Do you remember when you first heard the phrase?

Hricko

Well, I think I had no idea what it meant when I first heard it, and that's part of the problem. Most people have no idea what goods movement is, and just the fact that it has the word good in it implies that it's--

Collings

Yes, exactly. And movement, movement is good, right?

Hricko

Right. So of course we have to move goods, and the real question then is really looking at this path of goods, imported cargo and containers along a path that it travels and figuring out what its impact is.

Collings

And are they all good?

Hricko

And are they all good? [laughs] I don't think so.

Collings

Yes, it's a bit of a problem. Okay. So, let's see.

Hricko

If we had the P.R. experts that the ports do, I'm sure we could come up with something better.

Collings

Yes. I mean, I would think that probably the ports or I mean somebody on that end of things came up with the phrase, I would think.

Hricko

I should say the following though, that I do think that the Ports of L.A. and Long Beach do need to be applauded for moving forward on these issues, and I do think that Mayor Villaraigosa in appointing a whole group of new harbor commissioners, and then a new mayor in Long Beach, has made a big difference in terms of the ability to have people listen to the health concerns and legitimately be trying to work on them. Certainly the pace isn't as rapid as everyone would like it to be, but there is now an acknowledgment, as Commissioner [James] Hankla from the Port of Long Beach said to me when I testified recently, "We know the port has a toxic footprint. We're not denying that. We know we cause health effects." So that's a big step. That's really a big step forward, and there's a lot of money from both ports being put into plug-ins for electricity, so that when a ship is in harbor it doesn't have to be burning its diesel engines, running its diesel engines and idling. That's all very expensive, and electric cranes, etc. So the technology is really moving along.

Hricko

We believe that the ports and groups like Caltrans and Metro really need to be looking at alternative technologies for moving cargo on the highways. When you have a twenty-mile back and forth on a pretty straight 710 Freeway, it's a little unclear why you can't have an electric truck, for example, with a guideway that would go from the ports to the rail yards back and forth, and not have all that pollution for low-income, minority populations along the 710 Freeway.

Collings

Well, probably with all those independent trucking companies before the Clean Trucks Program it was just easier to, I mean, in effect outsource all of that--

Hricko

Exactly.

Collings

--and not even think about it really.

Hricko

So there are debates going on right now, an environmental review of the 710 Freeway, which also wants to double or triple in size, possibly be double-decked in some areas, and a discussion about one of the alternatives having this electric guideway for trucks on it, but whether there'll be enough political support to keep that guideway in there when the communities along the 710 don't have a lot of political clout. They are lower-income communities. I mean, if you look at South Pasadena and La Crescenta and some of the people who are complaining, well, South Pasadena on the extension of the 710 will be called the 710 Extension, like north of Alhambra. That's been fought for twenty years. One of the solutions now is to build a tunnel, because people in that part of town don't want to see a freeway with all that pollution. Well, that kind of a tunnel is only being considered in the really wealthy part of L.A. A tunnel would never be considered in, like under the 710 Freeway. So I think that there really are unjust decisions being made, and decisions being made about where the most political clout is.

Hricko

The head of Caltrans for L.A. went to a meeting in La Crescenta, went to a meeting in Glendale where residents were concerned about the tunnel. But he's never been to a meeting of residents along the 710 Freeway who are mostly Latino and mostly low income, so there really is a difference in the response. We've been seeing some figures from the county health department about high diabetes rates along the 710, which means you really don't want high air pollution along the 710 Freeway. It really has to be reduced, and there just aren't that many people involved in trying to draw attention to it.

Collings

Yes. So I think we talked about this a little bit before, but are you finding that the people who live along the 710 Freeway in Long Beach, these community groups are fully aware of these inequities, and that it inspires them to be more active?

Hricko

Certainly the Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma, and the other group that's really active along the 710, East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice--

Collings

So they are politically motivated in that way?

Hricko

Right. They are. Well, Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma is first and foremost an asthma organization, but they recognize that there is such an asthma problem with low-income people who may have also poor access to healthcare, might not have health insurance. But East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, they are first and foremost an environmental-justice organization that recognizes that other people in L.A. are not having that kind of exposure to diesel emissions as they are.

Collings

Okay. You talked about the electric track. It's hard to imagine Caltrans having money for that right now.

Hricko

Well, it's hard to imagine Caltrans building a new freeway, don't you think?

Collings

Yes, in fact.

Hricko

So a freeway itself is very expensive. So I don't know if it's been costed out yet. I think right now there's only actually one or two electric truck models that people have, but I'm not sure. I mean, it's basically like having another lane of a freeway with a track overhead or on the ground, sort of an electric track to guide the trains.

Collings

I was just wondering how this state economic crisis was factoring into this. You know, you have been referred to as the godmother of the ports and goods movement?

Hricko

No.

Collings

[laughs] And I suppose that means your liaison role, that's what I would have to think.

Hricko

The godmother or the grandmother? [laughs]

Collings

It was godmother. I guess you never heard that before.

Hricko

No. Well, I think that I have a tendency to really want to work with a lot of different organizations on this issue, especially the organizations who are truly interested in understanding the science, and not all community-based organizations are. I mean, people may have strategies that are really different than trying to get the latest science into their campaigns. But I'm very motivated to bring people together who are interested in that science, which is what I'm interested in and what my role is, and I'm also not afraid to go out to a

lot of night meetings and be presenting that science at harbor commission meetings and Alameda Corridor meetings and elected officials' meetings and community meetings, even if there are only ten people there. So I don't know where the phrase came about, but that's funny.

Collings

Well, I think that's probably it, pointing to this very active, hands-on role of putting people together.

Hricko

Together, right.

Collings

Which is probably the key to everything. [Interruption]

Collings

I think I know the answer to this question now, based on what you just said, but what's the most enjoyable part of this work for you, and what really makes it meaningful?

Hricko

I actually really like when I go to a meeting and see a community resident use some of our data, some of our scientific research findings, and present it to the city council people or to the harbor commissioners, so that they're not just saying, "My daughter has asthma," but, "My daughter has asthma, and I know that children who live closer to freeways are more likely to have asthma." It's very satisfying to know that some of the work that we've done has gotten down to different levels, and we've developed a Goods Movement 101 Program that not only tells people what goods movement is and how big a container is that carries international goods, but that also tells them how tiny particles are that can get into your lungs and how you might measure those particles, so this sense of sort of empowering community members to become their own scientists, which we've done also with people going out and counting trucks and measuring pollution and then presenting it. But also just other people who have heard it enough or been trained in it that they can present it themselves very effectively, that's very satisfying.

Collings

Yes. It also gives me the sense that it's been transmitting all of this scientific thinking into these government people as well.

Hricko

It has. It has, I think, because if at every hearing that there is, people are either getting a stack of scientific documents for their record, or are hearing the key scientific results, and they're hearing it again and again and from different people, then I think it really sinks in and it's no longer just somebody who doesn't want a crane in their neighborhood to look at, complaining about that. But there's real science here and there are real health effects, and people really

are being harmed, and having people understand that is really important. We actually went back to a report--in 2002 the Southern California Association of Governments did a report, a white paper on goods movement, and before we had had it in Adobe Acrobat so that we could do a search of how many times the word health appeared, I had a student intern count the number of times health appeared in that document. It wasn't in there.

Collings

Oh, my gosh.

Hricko

The word health or health effects, not in the document. And I've already told you what some of the harbor commissioners are saying. "No, we understand. We've heard from you, and we've heard from these community groups. We understand what the health effects are," like sort of, "We're ready to move on from this." That's a real difference in seven years, so that's also really satisfying. And there are lots of committee meetings. Even my husband doesn't understand why am I always at some nighttime meeting, but you have to stay on top of some of these, because decisions keep being made in all these different projects. There are just dozens of projects out there that will move forward without considering the health impacts unless someone's there testifying about it. So there's a lot of evening meetings and testifying at hearings, and comments on environmental-impact reports, and submitting stacks of scientific documents to the record of various proceedings in the hopes that down the road somebody will go back and say, "Oh, they were told that in 2007 or 2009."

Collings

So do you see this work having an end? [laughter]

Hricko

Well, I think partly what I was saying about a couple of years ago--a couple of years ago we felt more like this was coming to an end because it really felt like the ports were moving along and all this was happening. But all of a sudden in the last couple of months this huge Middle Harbor project at the Port of Long Beach got approved, and the 710 Freeway expansion, it feels like you can't even tell who the decision makers are at Caltrans, or who's going to even look at any scientific data if you give it to them, so it feels much more frustrating than it did a couple of years ago, because the Port of Long Beach claims it's doing a great job and here's this terminal that's going to have twice as much traffic coming out of it. And Caltrans, of course, claims that if they build a freeway twice as big that traffic's going to move twice as fast, so there's going to be half as much pollution, and it never happens that way in real life. And yet somehow their models show that.

Hricko

So I don't know, the struggles feel like they just keep coming, and the need to keep getting the science out so that different groups of decision makers hear it. I hadn't actually anticipated that not only would we have all the local elected officials along the 710 to convince about the health impacts, but also Metro has a hand in it, the Gateway Council of Governments, Caltrans has a big role, and so there are all these different parties. And unlike the harbor commission, where you can go, there's always public comment and you can go at every harbor commission meeting if you wanted to and talk about the latest science. Caltrans doesn't have a board. They don't have a leadership like that, that you can testify in front of. You can't--there's no there there. You can't put your finger on exactly who the decision makers are and how you can get the latest information to them on some of these health impacts, and I think there are other people who have learned that for five decades about Caltrans, but this is our first. There are a couple of projects that we're involved in with Caltrans in trying to get the traffic data to be correct and the counts of trucks to be correct, because all of the pollution data are based on how much traffic there is. And so there's an SR 47 and then the 710 Freeway-SR 47 expressway that are both Caltrans projects, and it's already really frustrating.

Collings

Do you sense that there might be some problems with fatigue on the part of the community groups that are participating with you?

Hricko

I think that comes and goes. I mean, I think that, yes, there are times when all of us have been pretty burned out. There is a sabbatical program that's offered for some of the EJ activists, and so Penny took a three-month, I think, or four-month sabbatical. Hopefully some of the other partners will also be doing that. So I think that that's a way to rejuvenate.

Collings

Well, that's a very good idea. We could all use that. [laughs]

Hricko

We could all use that. But I think it's going to be a while before some of these major projects are either built or not built, or sort of the deliberations about them are over. I think we're going to have a lot of building happening in southern California, both with regard to freeways, for goods movement and for automobiles, and the port expansions that are going on, so unfortunately there's going to be a lot more work to do.

Collings

Yes. I mean, it's always sort of a problem when you get an apology, because it's like, "Yes, we know we have a toxic footprint," and then what?

Hricko

Right. Exactly.

Collings

So, I mean, all the work leading up to that statement, and then it kind of goes off a precipice, in a sense.

Hricko

Right. And one of the commissioners said, "I know enough about how things work to recognize that your leadership," when I was testifying, "that your leadership and the advocacy of others has gotten us to where we are today with greening our port. But," he then said, "we really have to have some balance in how we're moving forward, in looking at jobs and the economy versus the environment." And that balance word is something that I think shouldn't be used when you're talking about health impacts. I think you really have to protect people's health, and balancing that isn't quite the right word to use with other issues.

Collings

Right, okay.[End of interview]

Date: